

S E R M O N S,

BY

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J. R. M. O. N.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH

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A N D

ONE OF HIS MAJESTY'S CHAPLAINS IN ORDINARY IN SCOTLAND.

VOLUME THE SECOND.

L O N D O N:

PRINTED FOR CHARLES DILLY IN THE POULTRY.

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S E R M O N S

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PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY IN KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON.

ONE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD.

VOLUME THE SECOND.

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we know not how to return. They proceed from evil to evil, is not a description only of one nation, but of every vicious person. Every man always

S E R M O N I.

THE PROGRESS OF VICE: THE FIRST STAGE.

cannot think of the smallest in-
without reluctance; by forcing himself to
commit it, he takes pleasure in it;
in consequence of this he commits it often; by
being out of company, he becomes habitual.

J E R E M. ix. 3.

They proceed from evil to evil.

IT is a maxim confirmed by the experience of ages, That few become abandoned to vice all at once. If they who have become most profligate, had foreseen, at their first setting out, the full extent of that depravity and guilt under which they now lie down without concern or remorse, they would have sickened at the prospect, and shrunk back with horror and detestation. Sin is of an insinuating, deceitful, encroaching nature. It is with reason that the Scriptures so often represent it as a *departing from God*. The first step carries us but a little from the right road; every step removes us a little farther from it; at length the distance becomes immense, and

we know not how to return. *They proceed from evil to evil*, is not a description only of one nation peculiarly degenerate: it is applicable to every vicious person. *Evil men always wax worse and worse**. Whoever engages in any sinful course, will find it difficult not to go forward; and still more difficult the farther he has gone. A man of an ingenuous mind cannot think of committing the smallest sin without reluctance; by forcing himself to commit it, he learns to repeat it with less reluctance; soon after he takes pleasure in it; in consequence of this he commits it often; by being often committed, it becomes habitual, and depraves the whole temper of his soul.

In order to put you on your guard against the deceitful insinuations and successive encroachments of vice, I propose to trace out the ordinary steps of the sinner's progress *from evil to evil*. However numerous they are, they may be naturally reduced to three general stages.

THE *first*, comprehends those steps of mental indulgence by which irregular inclinations and vicious passions are inwardly cherished, till they break forth into overt acts of sin:

* 2 Tim. iii. 13.

THE

THE *second*, those steps by which, in consequence of wilful sin, vicious habits are contracted, strengthened, and multiplied:

THE *third*, the confirmation of the corrupted heart in profligate wickedness and enmity against religion.

THE Psalmist points at a very similar distribution. *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful**. Three gradations of vice are distinctly marked. At first a man *walks* in it, indulges himself only in transient acts: next he *stands* in it, his wickedness is habitual: at last he becomes so inflexible and obdurate, that he *sits* down satisfied in his degeneracy. At first, he is occasionally seduced by listening to the *counsel* of the vicious, by corrupting communication, or by some strong temptation: then he spontaneously takes the same *way* with them, and customarily conforms to their evil practices: and at length he is not only confirmed in his own wickedness, but becomes one of the *scornful*, ridicules virtue and religion, and labours to corrupt those who have not yet abandoned them. The body of sin has its

* Psal. i. 1.

periods of growth, analogous to those of man's natural life. In its infancy, it is kept alive and cherished by favourable circumstances; its strength is inconsiderable; it may easily be restrained or destroyed. In its youth it becomes robust and ungovernable; it can support itself; it is impetuous, uncontrollable, and violent in all its exertions. When it has reached maturity, its constitution is fixt, its operations determined, its force irresistible, and it arrogates authority to tutor men in wickedness.—Each of the three stages into which we have distinguished the progress of vice, will furnish ample matter for a separate discourse.

THE first of them shall be our present subject. It includes that train of mental indulgences, by which irregular inclinations and vicious passions are inwardly cherished, till they break forth into overt acts of wilful transgression. *When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin* *. If the desire of a forbidden object, or the desire of obtaining any object by unlawful means, be not checked as soon as it begins to rise, it becomes the embryo of vice, and grows and ripens into open wickedness.

* Jam. i. 15.

Too often, it must be acknowledged, its growth is extremely quick; it is conceived, formed, and born almost in the same hour. Many have never been taught to attend to the difference between right and wrong: they are regardless of it, and care little how they act. Their passions have been seldom curbed; and have become so violent by the time they are capable of vice, that they hurry them into one sin after another, just as they find an opportunity of committing it. But such as have received a virtuous and pious education, are generally for some time modest and harmless, shocked with the baseness of vice, and afraid to venture on it. Their faults are chiefly those of ignorance, or infirmity, or inadvertence. These seldom throw off the impressions of their education all at once; often they efface them by slow and painful touches.

YOUNG persons are gradually introduced into the world. Temptations meet them, and obtrude themselves upon them. The good things of this world, naturally, and in themselves innocently desirable, appear in situations in which they cannot reach them but by unlawful means: evils to which they are necessarily averse, are so placed that they cannot avoid them without sin. In the simplicity of his heart, the youth *passeth through the street,*

near the corner where vice hath her abode; unknowing, unsuspicious, *he goeth the way to her house**. The forceress casts herself in his way: she puts on her most dazzling attire; she covers her face with smiles; she confidently promises him ease, pleasure, riches, or enjoyment; she importunately urges him to taste her delights, and to share her treasures. More fortunate, we shall suppose, than the *young man void of understanding*, whom Solomon *discerned among the youths*†, he resists her attacks. It is much if he does. But, to give you the more alarming view of the multiplied dangers of corruption to which the best guarded innocence is obnoxious, we shall suppose that, after the temptation, he continues as averse to vice as before: let him be even more careful to shun the like occasions of hazard to his virtue.

BUT, in this state of probation, the greatest care cannot prevent our falling into temptation, almost every day. He again finds himself in circumstances which invite him, perhaps more urgently, to the same or to some other vice. He retreats not with sufficient speed: he guards not his heart with sufficient diligence. Elated with his former victory, he is confident

* Prov. vii. 8.

† Jer. 7.

of his own resolution. He apprehends no great difficulty in repelling this temptation likewise; he has little dread of falling before it; he becomes secure and negligent. His security, it is highly probable, will quickly betray him into sin. With the best intention of firm attachment to his Lord, with full confidence that he never would *be offended because of him, that though he should die with him, he would not deny him* *, Peter followed Jesus into the judgment-hall: but there he was unexpectedly assaulted by a temptation to deny him, and he was instantly overpowered by it †. Undervaluing an enemy, has often occasioned a defeat. If you become insensible of the power of temptation, you are lost. It is only by keeping at as great a distance from it as possible, and by reckoning every temptation formidable to human weakness, that you can be safe.

BUT suppose your sense of duty so strong, as to restrain you, though negligent, from full compliance, from overt acts of sin; yet whenever the natural object of a passion presents itself in a situation in which it cannot be lawfully pursued, it has a plain tendency to excite the desire of obtaining it by unlawful

* Mat. xxvi. 33. 35. † Ver. 58. 70.

means; and it has the stronger tendency, the oftener it presents itself. The very first motion of desire, which it necessarily produces, is a seed, not yet fully shaped and organized, but fit to expand itself quickly into sin. The desire, however faint, will soon gain strength, if it be not immediately and resolutely crushed. The least voluntary indulgence, though but in thought, will nourish it. But when the object of an unlawful passion is often in our view, and in our power, it is very difficult to abstain from all indulgence so much as in thought. It is natural for a man to think of the temptation to which he was exposed, and the sin to which it urged him: and though at first he think of it with aversion, there is danger that he will come in time to regard it with more favourable sentiments. Before he is aware, imagination paints the object of vicious passion in attractive colours. Embellished by its pencil, sensual pleasures smile, riches glitter, honours glow. He deliberately fixes his eye upon them; he begins to contemplate them with complacency and delight. To revel in voluptuousness, seems to be enjoyment; to abound in wealth, appears to be magnificence; to bring harm on his enemies, he thinks, would be a triumph. He gives a welcome entertainment to the evil motions of his heart.—Happy is who then takes the alarm,
and

and flees while yet he has it in his power to flee! This is something more than the first motion and necessary propension of the heart. These imaginations are evil, and they give form and animation to the embryo of vice. If they be indulged, they will render the passions irregular and turbulent. You will find an inclination rising to gratify them, though it be unlawful. You will regret that it is unlawful. You have a painfulness, an eagerness, an impatience of desire, which you never knew before. You pant for the pleasure or the profit which would attend the sin; you wish to commit it for the sake of them. Already *thine heart hath declined to the ways of sin, devising wicked imaginations*; you want but a fit occasion of *going astray in her paths**. Already your will has consented to the perpetration of iniquity: and by that consent your soul is polluted, and guilt contracted. Sin is conceived, it is perfected within; it only waits opportunity to be brought forth into act. Often men have so far indulged their passions, so entirely consented in their hearts to sin, that their not committing it is in no measure owing to their virtue, but solely to the kindness of Providence in withholding opportunity. If they abstain from it, when they

* Prov. vi. 18. vii. 25.

have a favourable opportunity, it must be by a struggle between pampered passion and the sense of duty, harder, more determined, and more laborious, than the weakness of human virtue can generally sustain. By inwardly indulging vicious passions for a while, vice becomes familiar to our thoughts; the horror of it wears off; all the principles of restraint are enfeebled. They have raised a tumult in the soul, amidst which the still voice of conscience cannot be heard; they have kindled a flame which all the suggestions of reason cannot extinguish; a violent eruption can scarcely be prevented. It is by timeously refusing all occasions of indulging them, by obstinately denying them their food, by withdrawing every incentive to them from the very first, that you can, through divine assistance, hinder their growing into such force, and hurrying you on irresistibly to fulfil their dictates.

SUPPOSE, however, your sense of virtue so strong, as still to restrain you from the full commission of the sin. Passion will pretend, that it will be satisfied with some degree of indulgence, short of complete gratification. It is become too powerful not to be persuasive. Forgetful that, between disordered passion, and virtue, no accommodation can take place, you are disposed to make some concession

sion to your passions, but with a firm resolution not to go the length of an overt act of sin. You will not allow the love of money to carry you to dishonesty, but you will yield to it so far as to avail yourselves of a little address. You will not suffer malice or resentment to transport you into injury, but you will soothe them by treating your enemy as hardly as justice can permit. You will not be subservient to the vices of the man whose favour you court, but you will not be so nice as not to flatter him in them. You will not sink yourself into drunkenness, but you will give way to a continuation of exhilarating draughts. You will abstain from deeds of uncleanness, but you will not deny yourself the pleasure which arises from words or actions of slight lasciviousness. You will never enter within the territories of vice, but you will indulge yourself in approaching to them. You will not transgress the limits of innocence, but you will venture as far as is consistent with the preservation of your innocence. By such a concession, you flatter yourself, the importunity of your passions will be diverted; the uneasiness which they give you, removed; and your inclination to the sins which they demand, weakened. Delusive is the expectation! Vice has gained the victory, if she once persuades men to make any approach to her. There is no security

security but in keeping at the greatest distance from her. *Enter not into her path, go not in her way ; avoid it, pass not by it ; turn from it, and pass away*.* *Avoid all appearance of evil†.*—

Is it certain that the very indulgence which you propose to give yourselves, is perfectly lawful? It is not always easy to fix the precise boundary between virtue and vice. They run insensibly into one another, like day and night. You cannot discern the very point at which the one ends, and the other begins. By resolving to proceed to the extremest line of innocence, a thousand to one but you slide into real vice. *The law of God is spiritual§, and his word is very pure||.* What men call justifiable liberties, he often abhors as gross sins.— But suppose the indulgence not absolutely unlawful. Yet to venture on it, is only to give new force to your temptations, and to encrease the danger of your situation. It is as if the governour of a fortress, instead of maintaining his post, should lead out a small garrison to encounter a great army in the open field. It is the strength which passion has already acquired by your indulging evil imaginations, that enables it to produce an inclination to make any approach to sin ; and that approach will bring it such an accession of strength as

* Prov. iv. 14, 15.

§ Rom. vii. 14.

† 1 Theff. v. 22.

|| Psal. cxix. 140.

to produce a much more violent propensity to the completion of the crime. Every strong passion, every inflamed appetite, engrosses the soul, and unfits it for the reflection and exertion by which it might be restrained; and every advance in the gratification of it, proportionably augments its influence, and enervates all the powers of resistance. Indulgence in whatever has the remotest tendency to vice, never fails to invigorate the vicious passion. Thus humoured, thus gratified, it domineers; it craves with irresistible importunity; it combats the sense of duty; it disdains controul; it subverts every resolution of retaining our integrity; it occasions insupportable uneasiness in forbearing the sin by which its demands would be fulfilled. A strong fortification may withstand a great force; but if a very small detachment gain an entrance, they can introduce the whole with ease. Stand remote from vice, and you may be safe: but go within its reach, and you will be drawn forward as by the suction of a whirlpool. He who has allowed himself in rigorous exaction, will become less scrupulous of extortion. He whose resentment has already refused good offices, which he persuaded himself were not indispensibly due, is the nearer to venturing on ill offices, which are indisputably wrong. The oftener a man has repeated his draughts, the more desirous

he

he is to continue them, and the less aware of the danger of his being intoxicated. David espied Bathsheba by accident; he indulged his rising passion but so far as to gaze upon her: it was inflamed; it gave him no rest, till it plunged him into adultery. A narrow fountain sends forth a copious stream; an inconsiderable seed grows up into a stately cedar; any vicious passion, a little indulged, will burst into heinous sin. If ever you find yourselves disposed to compound with passion, recollect yourselves, and retreat without delay; you are on the point of sacrificing your innocence. *Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burnt? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burnt *?* Had Joseph allowed himself in any liberties with the wife of Potiphar, he must have fallen: it was by the most guarded, determined avoidance of every approach to guilt, that he escaped; when she enticed him to incontinence, he *refused* with the most peremptory firmness; when the temptation was repeated, he would hold no parley with it, but run to a distance; when *she spake to him day by day, he hearkened not to her to be with her*; and when *she caught him by his garment, he fled and got him out †*.

BUT if it can be supposed, that even after your negligent or presumptuous approaches to

* Prov. vi. 27, 28.

† Gen. xxxix, 7,—12.

evil,

evil, your heart still recoils from it, and your conscience cannot be reconciled to the unreserved perpetration of it; yet vice may cunningly abate your reluctance, and elude the opposition of conscience, by suggesting that you will indulge yourselves but this one time. You will not make a practice of it; you will only try the experiment. There cannot be very great harm in a single act; and you are determined not to repeat it. You hope that you shall not again be placed in so difficult a situation: but if you should, you are resolved to resist. Your passion, you are confident, will be satisfied with this one gratification; at least it will be so far blunted as to demand another with less importunity; it will want the aid of novelty; and you will find it easier to withstand it. Infatuated man! Can it be easier to forsake a vicious course once begun, than to avoid beginning it? Can you best secure a retreat from sin, by yielding it the victory? In every moment of temptation you stand on the brink of a precipice; if you begin to stumble, your danger is imminent; but if you throw yourself over, it were dotage to think that you can stop your fall. How much hurt you may sustain, how much your spirit may be marred, your principles spoiled, and your temper corrupted, by deliberately

berately consenting to one act of heinous sin, it is difficult to say. *The beginning of sin is as when one letteth out water* *: once allowed to overflow, it becomes an impetuous torrent, sweeping away whatever would oppose it.

IF all the indulgence which you have given to your vicious passions has not so far corrupted your hearts as to efface your abhorrence of a great transgression, it cannot fail to have at least impaired your sense of obligation, and your inclination to comply with the calls of duty. If it cannot yet precipitate you into the commission of a gross act of sin, it will be able to lead you into the omission of some of those duties which you have hitherto been careful to perform. Unfitted by the agitation of your passions, for relishing the pleasures of devotion; less intent upon its exercises; you begin to trifle away the sabbath-day, you intermit your regular attendance on the ordinances of religious worship, you break off your wonted assiduity in prayer to God, you read not the Scriptures so frequently, or with so much attention and reverence as formerly. It is very often, by neglecting the external and positive duties of religion, that they who have been well educated,

* Prov. xvii. 14.

and

and they who have made a fair appearance for a while, begin to give themselves up to open vice. The neglect passes easily upon them: it is not the violation of a moral law; and some latitude, and many limitations, must be admitted in the observance of ceremonial precepts. But experience testifies that, when they who once were regular have become remiss in outward worship, they rarely fail to pass with rapidity into direct immorality: and reason declares that it scarcely can be otherwise. To learn to think lightly of duties which they used to venerate as sacred, naturally unhinges all their principles, and subverts the authority of conscience. These duties are the great instruments of preserving our regard to moral duties, of enlivening the sentiments, and supporting the principles, which instigate to the practice of them: when therefore they are neglected; when our own passions, and the temptations of the world conspire in impelling us to vice, and we refuse to employ the only counterbalance to their impulse, how can we but fall headlong into vice? Many whose abandoned manners and atrocious crimes brought them at last to an ignominious death, have begun their confession with breach of the sabbath and neglect of devotion; and have acknowledged a very quick transition from this omission, to the perpetration of the basest sins.

WERE it possible that your heart, tainted with the exorbitance of passion, and defenceless by neglect of the means of restraint, as it has become, should still shrink from heinous immorality; the power of ill example and vicious company may soon conquer your repugnance, and complete your overthrow. The wicked practices and the corrupt fashions of the world are open to every eye; the most innocent must see them, the most circumspect cannot help taking notice of them; if you would altogether avoid even the conversation and society of sinners, *then must ye needs go out of the world* *. Every indulgence of irregular passions gives a propensity to fix the mind upon them, to feel their force, to allow them authority, to avail yourselves of their sanction. The discourse and the manners of the vicious attract you by their congruity to the depraved motions of your own hearts; their freedom and laxness is gratifying and encouraging to the workings of your imagination and your passions; they have many agreeable qualities, or estimable and useful talents; you become fond of them, and pleased with their company. The vices from which you have hitherto with difficulty restrained yourselves, you observe commonly practised by them: you abate the

* 1 Cor. v. 10.

rigour of your restraint; and your passions become stronger. Your inbred disposition to imitate, co-operates with the strength of passion, in propelling you to sin. You care not to be singular, it is unpleasant; and you cannot think it necessary. You see your elders, your superiors, and those who are reckoned wiser than yourself, allowing themselves in vice; and you begin to believe that it is something manly. It becomes familiar by being often seen; it looks not so hateful as before: you first endure it, and then embrace it. As yet you have been timid, afraid of contracting guilt; your fear has been roused by every temptation, and has kept you from yielding to it: but it is allayed by observation of multitudes acting wrong without scruple or apprehension; it is despised as a littleness of mind, and meanness of spirit; you are emboldened to follow their example. Modesty is the attendant of innocence, and cannot be totally extinguished even by some deviation from innocence: it has hitherto been your guard; you have been preserved from sin by your full conviction that it is shameful and reproachful: you would have been confounded by a detection in it: but when you have become the admirer or the companion of men who practise it with impudence, avow it with effrontery, glory in their enormities, affect to

appear worse than they are, and ridicule every scruple in fulfilling the desires of their hearts; your modesty must be soon effaced, and your virtue bereaved of every support. To be intimate with the vicious, is dangerous to the most confirmed virtue; to him who has suffered his passions to grow irregular and excessive, it is unavoidable corruption. *Go not in with vain persons, sit not with evil-doers * : fly from them, if you can; and if you cannot fly, be doubly on your guard; keep your heart as with a bridle, while the wicked is before you †.*

SHOULD happy situations preserve you from the influence of ill company and example, or should your conscience remain so active, your abhorrence of sin so strong, that all that influence cannot forcibly bear it down; yet the continued and increasing indulgence of your passions may craftily undermine it, and beguile you into sin. They will dispose you to seek excuses for the full gratification of them: they will prepare your own hearts to suggest pretences for giving them licence: they will at least predispose you for laying hold of loose maxims and corruptive principles, when you find them in licentious books, or hear them in the conversation of the wicked. The violence

• Psal. xxvi. 4, 5.

† Psal. xxxix. 1.

and importunity of your passions has created a prejudice, a prepossession, in favour of such opinions; and prepossession makes you easily assent to them: when you wish that they were true, you will, without much difficulty, persuade yourselves that they are true. When Ahab's ambition had made him intent on the conquest of Ramoth-gilead, he eagerly hearkened to the false prophets who encouraged his design against it; but could scarcely be brought to consult Micaiah, whom he had never found obsequious to his vices, and gave him no credit, when he disapproved his enterprise*. When any passion has been indulged to a certain degree, it begets a propensity to embrace the flattering representations of depraved imagination concerning its object and exertion, and to disregard the remonstrances of conscience, and the pure principles of religion, which condemn its demands. —God will not, it possibly insinuates, be displeased with you for yielding to it: it can do him no hurt: you mean only a little gratification or advantage to yourselves, not at all to offend him: you cannot think that he will grudge you a little pleasure or a little profit, when your desire of it has become so vehement that you cannot be happy without it:

* 1 Kings, xxii. 3,—29.

can he have forbidden your gratifying the passions which himself has implanted in you? did he implant them only to torment you? But have your lusts already rendered your minds so undiscerning, as once to hesitate, whether these be the decisions of reason, or the sophisms of depravity? The naked import of all this is, that nothing can displease God which pleases you. Hurt him, you cannot; but does it follow, that you cannot hurt yourselves? Have you forgotten, that God gave you reason and conscience on purpose to govern all your appetites and passions; that he requires you to restrain them within the limits of his law; that you directly intend, and presumptuously resolve to offend and dishonour him, whenever you think of allowing them any gratification beyond these limits; that when they come to demand it, they have far outgrown what God made them, and shot up into enormity; that the distraction and torment which they now occasion, is the fruit of your own mismanagement, and neither the intention nor the necessary consequence of God's having implanted them?—But though he may be displeased, his mercy is great, and he will forgive you. This too is the sophistry of sin. It sets forward its advantages, but extenuates or veils its dangers. Where then has God declared, that the wilful sinner is entitled

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to his mercy? Where has he promised pardon, except on the condition of repentance and reformation? Where has he intimated favour to the person who, by flattering himself with forgiveness in what he knows to be wrong, adds presumptuousness to his disobedience? Under this impious delusion, you may go on in sin with tranquillity; but it is to certain destruction.—But though it is unlawful in itself, your situation is so peculiar as to justify it: your temptations are so strong that it is impossible to resist them. And so, as you formerly indulged negligence, in confidence that you could nevertheless easily avoid sin, you now think yourselves authorized to commit it, because your greatest efforts must be ineffectual for avoiding it. So contradictory are the suggestions of the corrupted heart! Fools and blind! not to remember that the temptations of this state of probation are appointed, not to justify crimes, but to exercise, and try, and improve the virtues of men.—The slightest attention to licentious or immoral sentiments and opinions, must be fatal. If your principles be compatible with vice, it will prevail by its own power; if they positively favour it, they add much to its power, and secure its victory. With this the riot of the debauchee, the dishonesty of the villain, the perversion of the promising youth, the defection of the person

who seemed for a while to be established in virtue, very often has commenced: they held in the reins of inclination till their minds were first abused by loose principles. *Let the counsel of the wicked be far from you* *: reject with abhorrence every opinion which pleads for the liberty of doing wrong. If you give any ear to it, the very next step will probably be, to act upon it, to break out into vicious practice: certainly it will render you more remiss in curbing your vicious passions; and from the remission they will acquire new strength, and tumble you down before the next temptation. Immoral principles will banish the reluctance of your hearts against sin; they explode it as the mere murmur of a narrow mind. They controvert the admonitions of conscience, and dispute its decrees. They give authority to crimes.

BUT if good principles have been so carefully planted, and taken so deep root in your souls, as to prevent your admitting a justification of acknowledged vice, your indulged passions will put you on finding some disguise, under which it may elude your detestation, pass itself upon your conscience, and betray you into the practice of it. Such disguises are

* Job, xxi. 16.

manifold;

manifold; and self-deceit is active and artful in selecting them. Often it borrows them from superstition: a form of religion is devised, composed wholly of faith and worship; the value of moral duties is depreciated, and their obligation slackened; the immoralities to which you are prone, of course become venial in your eyes; they will be amply compensated by the soundness of your principles, the assiduity and fervour of your devotion, and the burning of your zeal; and being so easily atoned for, you can have little scruple to commit them. In this manner a young Pharisee was reconciled to the dishonesty and violence common in his sect; and in this manner many Christians have allowed themselves in heinous crimes, while they imagined themselves very religious. In other cases, men give a false colouring to the particular vice to which their propensity is strong. They think there may be some means of rendering it consistent with their duty; they refine upon it; they contrive to make some alteration in its circumstances; they mould it into another shape; and thus hope to evade its guilt, and yet attain its very end. Balaam could not be brought to disobey the letter of the divine command, but he anxiously sought leave to disobey it; and when he could not obtain leave, he refused to pronounce a verbal execration against Israel; but he

he easily reconciled his conscience to what was worse, to seduce them into such wickedness as could not but subject them to the real execration of the Almighty*. David's conscience forbad him to cut off Uriah by a publick sentence or an explicit order for assassination; but it winked at his making himself the bearer of a command to betray him to certain death, and suffered itself to be blinded by the pitiful pretence, *the sword devoureth one as well as another*†. By the artifice of its colouring, by shading some of its features, and heightening others, by setting itself in some fallacious point of view, vice sometimes assumes the look even of virtue. Delusive imagination shews presumption for lively faith; ill-humour for seriousness; levity for cheerfulness; avarice for frugality; extravagance for generosity; cunning for prudence; censoriousness for plain-dealing; cruelty for godly zeal. If you detect not the imposture, you will perpetrate the most atrocious sins without condemning yourselves, you will even approve yourselves in the perpetration of them. If you wish not to be lost, never behold any vice but in its own deformity; never suffer it to put on a specious mask, or to set itself in an attractive attitude. God will view all your sins, not in the disguise

* Num. xxxi. 26. † 2 Sam. xi. 14.—25.

which

which your imagination gives them, but in their naked form; he will estimate them, not by the names which you allow them to usurp, but according to their real nature; he will try all your actions, not by the pretences with which you palliate them to yourselves, but by the principles and motives from which, in you, they actually proceed.

THUS have I endeavoured to lay open the train of inward indulgences, by which irregular inclinations are gradually brought forward into overt acts of wilful sin. Temptations to sin everywhere abound; they cast themselves in your way; they frequently recur: you but remit the strictness of your circumspection for a moment; in that unhappy moment they assault you; and if they cannot surprise you into sinful practice, they will at least make some impression on your mind: you think of sin with less abhorrence; imagination paints its form in pleasing colours; you fix your eye upon the picture, and are taken with it; your passions are inflamed, they prompt you to the sin by which they would be gratified, they make it painful to forbear it: if they cannot all at once precipitate you into the sin, they will persuade you to comply with them so far as to make some approach to it; and though that approach should happen not to be itself

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absolutely unlawful, it will at least inflame them more violently, and render it torture to abstain from the full gratification of them : they will next urge you to gratify them, if it were but once, and will probably prevail with you : if they should still find difficulty in prevailing with you to commit an heinous act of sin ; the neglect of devotion and religious duties, to which your indulgence of them and the depravation of heart consequent upon it, must dispose you ; or the influence of ill company and example, to which these must lay you open ; or some of those loose maxims and immoral sentiments to which these must render you prone to listen ; or some of those false colourings by which self-deceit artfully varnishes over the hatefulness of sin, cannot fail quickly to remove the difficulty, and to betray you into the practice of wickedness.

By such steps as these, the well-educated youth is perverted from his innocence, and led to commence a career of vice. Alas, how many come to the full and open practice of vice by a much shorter road ! By these same steps, good men deviate into the particular acts of sin, sometimes of heinous sin, which, in this imperfect state, too often degrade their character and pollute their conduct. While you are engaged in this inward struggle against
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your irregular passions, it is in suspense, whether you shall remain virtuous, or degenerate into vice. If you now prefer the latter, either you must continue its slaves, or you must recover yourselves, and that too but incompletely, from its dominion, by bitter and painful repentance. One act of gross sin committed, you will experience a wretched change in the state of your mind: your innocence is lost; your conscience is wounded; your peace is gone. The aspect of the sin is totally reversed; its charms are fled, its horrors force themselves into your view; you abhor it, and you abhor yourself for having committed it. You are afraid of God, afraid of yourself, afraid of every thing. You are ashamed to look up; you feel that you have disgraced yourself. You go about disconsolate, and bear a hell within you. To be again what you was but one hour ago, you would purchase at any price; but no price can purchase it. A moment may forfeit your innocence; but then it is irrecoverable for ever: the heartiest repentance cannot efface the humiliating sense of your having fallen, or deliver you from the sharp stings of occasional remorse. Dreadful are often the reflexions of a soul not wholly depraved, on its first act of gross and open sin! Yet to suffer them in all their strength, is the greatest happiness that can befall the sinner

ner. It is the only thing that can prevent his plunging deeper into wickedness, and incurring either more excruciating reflexions in this world, or insufferable misery in the next.

To render your abstinence from a course of wickedness, either easy or certain, you must crush sin while it is forming in the heart; and the earlier you crush it, the easier will be your task, and the more infallible your success. *Keep thy heart with all diligence* *. Guard every avenue by which sin may find an entrance into it; mark every temptation the moment it occurs, and instantly avoid it. Attend to the inmost motions of your hearts; observe the thoughts which attempt to rise within you; if they be evil, exclude them, or banish them without delay; suffer them not to dwell on any unlawful or seducing object; accustom them to fix only on what is good or improving. Keep a jealous eye over all the workings of imagination; turn it away from whatever can encourage vicious passions; force it to such views as are fit to check their growth. Watch over all your inclinations, passions, and affections; confine them to their proper objects; let them never swell into excess. Allow not the most hidden purpose or design of sin to find

* Prov. iv. 23.

a moment's entertainment in your souls; fortify them by such resolutions as are virtuous. By this course alone, the innocent can preserve their innocence; and by this course alone, more laboriously pursued, it is that they who have gone some lengths in vice, can retrieve themselves.

CONTENT not yourselves with endeavouring to restrain your passions from breaking out into vicious practice, while you indulge them inwardly. It is far from sufficient, to regulate your external conduct. This was the corrupt doctrine of the Jewish teachers. *But ye have not so learned Christ**; to this wicked doctrine he set himself in the most zealous opposition. Were it possible to confine vicious passions within the heart, yet there they are open to the eye of God, and odious in his sight, and there they pollute your souls, and destroy your quiet. If thou in thy heart consentest to thoughts or designs of sin, thou art truly guilty, though no trace of them were visible in thy behaviour. The lusts of the heart are like ulcers, which, without a speedy extirpation, will fester and become incurable, though they lie so deep, and are so well concealed by decency of conduct, as not to be

* Eph. iv. 20.

seen by men. But it is impossible long to regulate the conduct, except we first govern the heart. *Out of it are the issues of life* *. No labour will dry up the streams, if we cannot drain the fountain-head. If evil passions be not mortified in the heart, they will soon become ungovernable, compel us to vicious practice, and involve us in an inextricable labyrinth of wickedness.

* Prov. iv. 23.

S E R M O N II.

THE PROGRESS OF VICE: THE SECOND STAGE.

J E R E M. ix. 3.

They proceed from evil to evil.

IF the general of an army were informed, that the enemy intended to attack him, his first care would naturally be, to get intelligence of his motions, of his present situation, of the part on which he expected to make an impression, of the stratagems which he would employ for facilitating the execution of his design; and the more perfectly he learned these particulars, the better he would be prepared to repel him. Our condition in this world is similar; and our conduct ought to be the same. We are every moment in danger of being assaulted and vanquished by sin. Its power is great, its deceitfulness is greater. It gains upon us by gradual, often

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by imperceptible steps; and for every step, it makes the most artful preparations. To be acquainted with these, is to be in some measure qualified for defeating it. I have therefore proposed to trace out the progress of vice, to explain the manner in which men, having given the smallest indulgence to sinful thoughts and inclinations, *proceed from evil to evil*. In the foregoing discourse, I have described the FIRST of the three stages into which that progress may be distinguished, by laying open the train of mental indulgences by which irregular inclinations and vicious passions are inwardly cherished, till they break forth into overt acts of sin. In this discourse, I shall endeavour to delineate the SECOND stage, which comprehends the steps whereby, in consequence of wilful sin, vicious habits are contracted, strengthened, and multiplied.

No sooner has a person, unaccustomed to vice, committed an act of wilful sin, than he is dissatisfied with himself, and purposes and promises not to repeat it. The fear of its being known, or the shame of detection, the reproaches or the admonitions of virtuous friends, heighten his emotions, aggravate his remorse, and enforce his purposes. He is suspicious of his own frailty, attentive to his conduct, and solicitous to restrain the passion
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which had led him astray. He hopes that conscience has re-assumed its sway, and that he is recovered to virtue. But after a while, passion begins to raise its voice, and to exert its strength. It has once been gratified, and by that gratification, both its importunity and its power have been increased. Temptations press upon him, and plead for the indulgence of his passions. Alternately he is disposed to proceed in vice, and to return to virtue: his mind fluctuates irresolute between the two; it is distracted by contrary motions; it is worn out with painful agitation; it again yields to the violence of passion. Very seldom does a man acquiesce in a solitary act of sin: having committed one crime, many causes concur in producing a repetition of it. By once violating innocence, you break down the strongest barrier against vice. By having been once indulged, your vicious inclinations become more refractory and unconquerable. At the same time, all those principles of your nature, which ought to combat them, are reduced to act with less confidence and vigour. The reluctance which rises strong against a transgression that you have never ventured to commit, cannot rise in equal strength against one on which you have already ventured. You have already cast off allegiance to conscience, and determined that absolute subjection to its

commands is not indispensable. You have already disclaimed its authority, and withstood its power. Having once disobeyed its dictates, how should you hold them sacred now? Having once forced it to bow its head under the usurpation of lawless lusts, how can it be able to throw off the yoke, when their usurpation is in some degree established? The reasons which you could have urged against the first transgression, you can never urge with equal force against any subsequent transgression: they have been already despised and contradicted. If from the former trespass you have found no immediate inconvenience arise, if you have even derived profit or pleasure from it, this will encourage you to the repetition of it, and will be accepted as a confutation of all the arguments for abstinence. Every ill example, every seducing maxim, every insinuation of self-deceit, will operate more successfully than before. To sin a second time, you need not put a force upon yourselves; you are prone to it, you feel little uneasiness in the thought of it. You seek no other reason for doing wrong, but that you have already done it. When temptation has found forward allies in your passions, has bribed your principles to admit its claim in silence, and has warped your reason to chicanery in support of it, you cannot be able to withstand.

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THE repetition of the sin, it may be, occasions a return of regret, self-condemnation, shame, and virtuous purposes. But they are feeble and more ineffectual than before. A short interval of time, or the recurrence of temptation, totally effaces them. Your vicious inclinations were strengthened by being indulged : by the restraint which you have since endeavoured to lay upon them, they are only irritated ; they rise ungovernable, and rush impetuous into vice, like a lion on his prey. Your hopeful purposes shrink and faint before them. The flame which had been smothered for a while, breaks forth with greater fury, You cast away your virtue, as if you had never formed a design of retaining it. One hour you are propense to vice, and the next hour uneasy in the recollection of it. When you are exposed to no temptation, you seem to be reformed ; but whenever a temptation assaults you, you relapse. Every time it defeats you with greater ease ; your efforts to resist it, are weaker ; your inclination to comply with it, more eager ; your consciousness of having complied, less painful. Your vicious actions become every day more frequent ; the least temptation is too strong for you. Your vicious inclinations are more constantly heard and gratified ; they drive you on so furiously, that

you are again and again plunged into guilt, you scarcely know how.

By frequent practice, habits of vice must needs be formed. Great is the power of custom over the soul of man. When we attempt an action which we have never attempted formerly, we find it difficult; but by performing it often, we learn to perform it easily. We likewise become prone to it; the passion which tends to that action, keeps possession of the heart, and operates almost without intermission. It constantly suggests images and sentiments fit to increase its strength, and assist its operation. We are in pain when we cannot exert it; to act upon it, is a pleasure. For things most disagreeable in themselves, custom creates a relish. By practice, therefore, the heart must become not only pliable, but bent to sin; and acquire first a facility, and next a pleasure in committing it. A very few acts will give a beginning to vicious habit; and as soon as it has begun to be formed, it will render our vicious actions very frequent. Every action is recommended by the same temptation as the first; and to its influence, the power of custom is superadded. For exertion against their combined force, you cannot inculcate any motive which you have not already baffled. *If thou hast run with the footmen, and they*

they have wearied thee, how then canst thou contend with horses?* The crime which you once hazarded with hesitation and reserve, you will now perpetrate boldly, and embrace with complacency. Your conduct is no longer stained by some transient misdeeds; it is contaminated in its general tenour. Formerly you only fell before a strong temptation; but now the slenderest temptation is irresistible; you will not even wait for a temptation from without; there is a permanent temptation within your own breasts. You will not now run into one sin, and then regret it; but you will hasten through a train of vicious conduct, and then awake to a course of sorrow, remorse, and self-reproach. The period of the former will become continually more extended and more flagitious; and that of the latter, shorter and less agonizing.

THE same construction of the human soul, which fits us for contracting habits, renders it unavoidable, that every habit which we have contracted should continually increase in strength. It forces us to act upon it; and by being acted upon, it is confirmed. A vicious habit needs only to be planted: as naturally as a tree flourishes in its proper soil, it will

quickly advance to a prodigious size. From each of the many indulgences to which it daily compels you, it will draw abundant nourishment. Actuated by habit, you will commit sin with growing pleasure; you will become expert in committing it, and more and more intent upon it. When a twig is bent at first, it will by its own elasticity recover its rectitude as soon as the force is removed; but by continuing to bend it long, you may fix it in a curvature which can scarcely be corrected. Vicious habit will by degrees become so stubborn as to baffle all ordinary efforts to extirpate it. It destroys self-government; it puts the passions in possession of all the strong holds of the heart; you will find it difficult either to dislodge them, or to check their eruptions. The pain that attends your endeavours to forbear gratifying inclinations which have become habitual, adds much to the seeming value of the gratification: and the sense of that pain, together with the perverse tendency of your own heart, will render your pursuit of it keener, than in proportion to your most extravagant idea of its value. You no longer need the view of profit or of pleasure to entice you to a sinful action: you have acquired a fixt attachment to it, you run into it of course, without reflecting on any precise motive, or proposing any determinate consequences. Even
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the experience of ill consequences proceeding from it, is insufficient to prevent your soon returning to the commission of it. The drunkard whom Solomon describes, who had drowned sense and reason, on awaking to the exercise of them, found himself bruised and wounded, he knew not how, and complained bitterly, *they have stricken me, and I was not sick, they have beaten me, and I felt it not*: nevertheless he immediately said, *I will seek it yet again* *. The whoremonger, the thief, the robber, the oppressor, the miser, the malicious, the sinner of every denomination, meets with many severe checks and chastisements in the prosecution of his vice, by which he notwithstanding cannot be reclaimed. Habit necessarily engenders thoughtlessness: actions to which we are habituated, we do often every day, without either being conscious of it at the time, or recollecting it afterwards. Vicious habit extinguishes reflection. The voice of conscience is heard seldomer and more faintly. Its languid opposition is so far from repressing the irregularity of passion, or vanquishing the propensity of habit, that it increases their strength. To overcome it, they collect and exert their utmost force; and having quickly overcome it, they will go on with the same

* Prov. xxiii. 35.

accumulated force, driving you headlong into sin. By the long and customary practice of any vice, it will become predominant within you: it is dear to you as your *right hand*, or your *right eye**: you regard it as an intimate part of the constitution of your soul. Your heart is set upon indulging it; you think it impossible to live without it. What once you shunned as a dangerous temptation, you now court as a desirable opportunity. You are careful to embrace it; and by often finding, and often embracing it, your conduct is rendered habitually vicious, at least in one particular.

BUT your degeneracy will not be long confined to one particular. While from a single act, that vice to which your favourite passion or your peculiar situation has first betrayed you, is ripening into habit, many other vices will take root, and thrive beneath its shelter. Numberless are the ways in which one sin grows out of another.—The commission of any sin weakens, the habit of any sin destroys, our defence against every sin, and lays us open to it. It inures us to make light of obligation, and prepares us to disobey its dictates without distinction. It breaks the balance, and un-

* Mat. v. 29, 30.

hinges the order of our powers: they can no longer operate on one another as mutual checks. It dissolves the soul in anarchy, amidst which, like violence in a country void of government, every irregular passion rages unheeded and uncontrouled, and from which it finds occasions of fulfilling all its pleasure. Whatever be the sin, a temptation to which attacks the heart in this state of distraction, it must prevail. There is too much uproar and confusion within, to admit a strict examination, or a vigorous resistance. Every vice produces likewise peculiar effects favourable to the practice of other vices. Some enervate the soul, and render it effeminate; some contract or debase the heart; and some make it callous and unfeeling.—By thus debauching the heart from virtue, the practice of the smallest sins will make way for your committing the greatest. Men commonly begin with some lesser acts of vice: there are atrocious crimes, at the thought of which they would yet shudder. But if a small sin once gain admittance, because it is but small, another will likewise gain admittance, because it is but a little greater; and the same foolish deceit will lead you forward, step by step, to the most enormous transgressions. When conscience is defiled, these will not appear more horrid to it, than the slenderest offence did, when it was fair and uncorrupted.

uncorrupted. When you have brought yourselves to commit any sin, you will soon commit another more aggravated, with less uneasiness. If you suffer any of the malevolent passions to vent themselves in expressions of contempt and slight, they will quickly be poured out in bitter reproach and invective, and next proceed to violent contentions, fierce quarrels, and gross injuries. If you accustom yourselves to the use of foolish terms of asseveration or exclamation in your discourse, it will gradually reconcile you to swearing vainly by the name of God ; after a while the slightest provocation or impatience will burst forth into oaths and imprecations ; then neither provocation nor impatience will be necessary ; rashly, for the merest trifles, without consideration of the truth or the falsehood, the moment or the consequences of the matter, you will heap oaths and curses on one another ; and by thoughtlessly multiplying oaths in your ordinary conversation, you will at length come to despise them, and venture without much scruple on premeditated perjury, when you have a strong temptation to it. Peter at first simply denied that he had been with Jesus ; next he denied it with an oath ; the third time he denied with *cursing and swearing, that he knew the man* *. To suffer yourselves to be be-

Mat. xvi. 69.—74. Mark xiv. 66.—71.

trayed into any sin, by an imagination that it is small, is to consent that you shall gradually, but unavoidably, be drawn on to the most heinous sins.

It is not only by its tendency to introduce a general depravation of heart, that one sin leads men forward to other sins; it likewise begets many strong temptations to them. The natural progeny of every vice is numerous. With whatever vice you begin, you will find many others inseparably connected with it. To instance in the sensual vices, to which young persons are commonly most exposed; *whoredom and wine take away the heart**; intemperance of every kind intoxicates and stupifies, like a strong opiate; it infatuates the soul; it disposes to, and, when it has become habitual, it implies the neglect of all the duties which we owe to ourselves, our families, and our friends. Lewdness destroys all regard to decency and reputation, wears away the sense of shame, and produces impudence and effrontery in doing and in avowing the most flagitious actions. When Joseph rejected the solicitation of his mistress to commit adultery, his chastity upbraided her immodesty; his continued refusal at once inflamed and disappointed her lust;

* Hof. iv. 11.

she could scarce be but exasperated and incensed against him; and revenge and fury of course dictated the complication of falsehood and cruelty, which she found means to execute against him. Drunkenness makes a man incapable of the attention and recollection which is necessary for his doing right in any case, and exposes him an easy prey to every crime. If thou art addicted to it, *thine eye shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things**; thy tongue shall be abusive, thine hand shall be in quarrels, perhaps in bloodshed; *yea thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth on the top of a mast*†, ready every moment to plunge into an abyss of wickedness.—It would be too tedious to attempt enumerating all the ways in which one sin lays men under temptation to other sins: some of them, it will be proper to mention.

One sin will generally demand new sins, in order to conceal it. Evil is ashamed of itself; it cannot bear to be looked upon. To a novice in vice, detection appears insupportable: and often it would have consequences which the greatest proficient in vice trembles at the thought of incurring. What he has done, must

* Prov. xxiii. 33.

† Var. 34.

be concealed by any means. Diffimulation, lying, murder, it may be, is the only means of concealment. It must be perpetrated : infamy, punishment, ruin, cannot be otherwise avoided. When you have already given up yourselves to one vice, it cannot be expected that you should meet these, rather than commit another. When David knew that Bathsheba had conceived, he necessarily became anxious to prevent a discovery of his adultery : it could not be prevented without his consenting to some additional baseness ; and his anxiety led him into a series of the blackest designs. He first attempted to impose a spurious offspring on one of the bravest and most faithful of his captains ; but the attempt was defeated by Uriah's scrupulous attachment to a nice point of honour. The king made another effort to accomplish the imposition ; he wheedled him into drunkenness, that wine might inflame his passion ; but the same delicacy of honour preserved him from the snare. The horrors of a discovery, and the just resentment of an abused servant, stare David in the face ; they drive him on to the most violent and atrocious methods of averting them ; there are no others, and they must be adopted : Uriah is perfidiously sacrificed to the sword ; his courage, his fidelity, and his zeal are employed for his destruction ; many brave men are devoted along
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with him; and Joab is made a guilty accomplice in the butchery*. Complicated and enormous is the villany; but the concealment of a former sin demands it.

ONE sinful action, much more a continued course of sin, will sometimes involve men in such a labyrinth, that they cannot extricate themselves without new sin. To whatever hand they turn, they seem to be under a necessity of doing wrong. If they go forward, they plunge themselves deeper into guilt; and if they return, it must be by committing a greater sin than what they have already committed. No choice is left them, but between one crime and another: They are like mariners in a storm; to pursue their course, is to be swallowed up by the ocean; to steer for a haven, is to be wrecked upon the rocks. Saul had denounced with an oath, the death of him who should violate his rash adjuration to taste no food; Jonathan had unknowingly tasted a little honey, and incurred the punishment; and his father could avoid the injustice and cruelty of inflicting it, only by breaking his oath†. Herod, in an hour of dissipation, swore to give the daughter of Herodias what-
 -ob will not be obliged to read his book
 gnols 2 Sam. xi. 5, &c. 1 Sam. xiv, 11

of John, what could he fix upon? If he refused, he forfeited his promise in the presence of his officers and lords, and the *chief estates of Galilee*. He thought this so dishonourable and base, that he chose rather, in performance of his oath, to put to death a righteous man, a prophet, nay one greater than a prophet *. Engaged in vice, you must either plunge into all the crimes naturally consequent upon it, or infringe gratitude, friendship, honour, fidelity, in retreating. Perhaps the real fault lies only in your having reduced yourselves to so perplexing an alternative; and to embrace the only means of retreat, has but the appearance of faultiness. But you will probably think otherwise: vice commonly produces a perversion of sentiment, and insinuates false maxims of honour, by means of which, what an unhappy peculiarity of situation has rendered right and necessary, shocks more than what is absolutely wrong. You will go on, but find no end till you sink into perdition.

ONE indulged vice will always require many others for its support and execution. Avarice will not long be satisfied with the gratification which penurious savings, or toil-

* Mark vi. 21, &c.

some drudgery, can bring: for feeding itself, it will soon come to intercept the gift of charity, the retribution of gratitude, the oblation of benevolence, and it will next exact the practice of every dishonest art of making gain. Lust cannot effectuate its purposes without often employing deceit, falsehood, seduction, and inflicting injury the deepest and the most irreparable. The expensive vices cannot be continued without submitting to supply their demands by covetousness, injustice, fraud, or rapine. Every one among you who has, for the shortest time, addicted himself to any vicious course, knows, by certain experience, that in pursuing it, he has been forced to commit many other vices. For these subsidiary vices, you perhaps have no inclination; they are even perfectly abhorrent from your nature; but you must either consent to them, or abstain from your darling sin. Contrary propensions may for a while struggle within you, and distract your soul; you may shudder at the thought of what you must do: you may start back, and again start back, and wish and purpose to leave the deed undone. But the darling sin requires it; and it has got firm possession of your heart: reason, conscience, nature itself, resist in vain; that sin will at length prevail, and drive you into whatever crimes

crimes shall become necessary for accomplishing its ends.

By repeated acts, the several vices into which your favourite sin betrays you, will likewise become habitual. What you at first only endured for the sake of something else, you will in time acquire a proneness to, perpetrate for its own sake, and take delight in perpetrating. Your vice will not only grow inveterate, but also spread like a gangrene. It will at once strike its roots deeper, and extend its branches wider. What was in the beginning like a handful of small seeds, grows at last into a forest of lofty cedars. Your souls are overrun with vicious habits, continually increasing in strength and number, and fixing you in all manner of unrighteousness.

WHILE vice is thus rising to maturity, by the strength of those principles of growth which it contains within itself, it will likewise seek nourishment from every thing external that can supply it.—It will lay itself open to all the influence of ill example. The corrupted heart has a fixt bias to the society and the imitation of the vicious. Whatever be its present temper, whether passion or conscience predominates for the time, it pants for the company of the wicked with equal eagerness.

When your vicious passions rage, they will drive you into it, that you may find the opportunity of indulging them, and encouragement to give them full scope. When conscience resumes its place, and cuts you with its rebukes, you will flee from the torment of your own reflections, to the haunts of evil-doers, that the levity of the thoughtless may divert your remorse, or that the audacity of hardier sinners may embolden you to disregard it. From every advance which you make in vice, ill example will acquire additional power to push you forward. The greater your own depravity is, the more easily you will be reconciled to vice by the custom of seeing it practised. You will scarcely need to be instigated by the propensity to imitation: you are under the dominion of those very passions, from which it directly proceeds. By associating together, sinners keep one another in countenance in prosecuting their evil courses, and are mutually incited to the prosecution of them by the sentiments, excuses, and recommendations, which they in their turns suggest. By yielding to the example, and entering into the society, of the vicious, you will become more hardened in the vice to which you are already addicted; and you will be seduced into many others, to which you have naturally no disposition. In the character of every
wicked

wicked man, along with the vices which are properly of his own growth, there are some which have been planted and reared solely by the influence of company and example. To this cause, the sin of customary swearing, common as it is, must be totally referred: there is no natural temptation to it, in the constitution or temperament of any human creature. Even a natural disinclination to a particular vice, will soon be conquered by the force of ill example: if your chosen intimates be devoted to it, you will learn to copy it from them. The man whom nature had endued with the quickest sense of honour, has often been enticed into the meanest practices. The man whom nature had fortified by an absolute aversion to intoxicating liquors, has often become a drunkard, sometimes the most abandoned to debauchery. The modestest youth has sometimes degenerated into the most shameless libertine. To frequent the assemblies of the wicked, is to take up your abode in a house filled with the contagion of every mortal disease. *O my soul, come not thou into their secret*. Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity†.*

In whatever degree your vice becomes habitual, it will have a tendency, proportionably,

* Gen. xlix, 6. † Psal. vi, 8.

to alienate you from all the means of curbing it. It will incapacitate you for the devout observance of religious ordinances; it will lead you on to the neglect of them; and from your coldness or neglect, it will draw fresh vigour. It will weaken your faith of the great principles of religion, which condemn it, deaden your sense of them, draw off your attention from them, and deprive you of their aid in resisting it. Conscience will remonstrate less frequently and less warmly the farther you proceed; and when it does remonstrate, you will, with greater and greater anxiety and success, set yourselves to silence it. You cannot think of forsaking your sins; and therefore you will study to make yourselves easy in them. Every step you take, you will the more eagerly grasp at those false opinions and licentious sentiments which seem to justify or extenuate your sins; and they will become the more effectual for encouraging you to take another step. You will the more solicitously avail yourselves of all the evasions and subterfuges of self-deceit; and in every stage of your progress, it will furnish some artful distinction, some delusive maxim, some plausible disguise, adapted to your situation, and calculated for producing security in it.

As long as your practice is confined to one favourite vice, which has not yet seduced you
into

into the frequent commission of others, you will soothe yourselves into the fearless indulgence of it, by a fond persuasion that it alone is not sufficient to denominate you vicious men. You are faulty in *this one thing*; but in it *the Lord* will surely *pardon his servants* *; you nevertheless have many virtues; these may make amends for one fault; and by means of these you may hope for the rewards of heaven. It is but a necessary imperfection inseparable from fallen man. No human character was ever uniformly excellent; the purest has had some stains, and the brightest some dark shades. Every one of the holy men whom the Scripture most commends, failed in some particular; and some of them were guilty of very heinous sins. You therefore may well be allowed in your peculiar frailty. But between the acts of sin into which good men have sometimes been surprized, and the practice of sin in which you live; between the temporary defections for which they mourned, and the customary transgressions which you justify to yourselves; between the iniquities from which they speedily recovered themselves by repentance, and those in which you deliberately resolve to persist; there is the widest difference. If you live in the habit of

* 2 Kings v. 13.

any one sin, you are as truly, though not in so high a degree, wilful and presumptuous sinners, as they who abandon themselves to more. God is so far from granting you allowance in your beloved vice, that against it he requires you to employ your most special care.

WHEN any vicious passion, by being confirmed into habit, has become so powerful that it conquers you on every the slightest temptation, you will begin to flatter yourselves that therefore it is only a sin of infirmity, for which God will never call you to a rigorous account. Though you fall so often before it, you approve it not, you submit not quietly to its dominion, you form frequent purposes against it : but still it prevails over the sense of your minds, and overthrows your strongest purposes ; and this convinces you that it arises unavoidably from the frailty of your nature, and will find an easy pardon. To facilitate the deception, you will labour to persuade yourselves, that it is but a small trespass ; and no vice is so enormous, but exorbitant passion may impose it on a corrupted conscience, as a small trespass. You compare your own sins with the most flagitious practices of other men ; and because you perceive them to be less, you conclude them to be venial. You do not scoff at religion, though you neglect all its duties :

ties: you oppress not your dependents to absolute ruin, though you harass them with severity: you are not murderers, though you be injurious: you live not in adultery, though you indulge yourselves in whoredom: you are not sunk into the sottishness of solitary drunkenness, though you never scruple to join in the riots of your company. If all the partiality of self-deceit cannot represent your sin as small in itself, you will extenuate it into a sin of infirmity, by referring it to the peculiarity of your temper or your situation: it is so deeply rooted in your constitution, it grows so necessarily out of your circumstances or occupation, it is so inseparably connected with your interest and views, that to you it is inevitable, and you must be pardonable in yielding to it. But you deceive yourselves. That only can be a sin of infirmity, which proceeds from excuseable ignorance, or sudden surprise. What is contrary to an express command of God, what you know to be at all a sin at the time of committing it, what needs refinement for reconciling it to the native sentiments of your hearts, must merit a very different name. It is a known, deliberate, wilful disobedience of your Maker. By gross abuse of yourselves, you have first contracted strong habits of vice; and now, when their strength is irresistible, you foolishly imagine that they are therefore but pitiable

pitiable frailties. The imagination is so desperately absurd, as necessarily to imply, that the more inveterate your vices are become, the more they are intitled to indulgence and forgiveness. If you can infatuate yourselves into the belief of it, you may obtain tranquillity in your customary sins: but you will, at the same time, harden yourselves in them, and prevent your ever thinking of that repentance, without which they must issue in your eternal ruin.

SOMETIMES, again, the habitual sinner quiets his conscience by devising superstitious equivalents for the virtue which he suffers himself to violate. He cannot abandon his vices, but he will make amends for them: he will punctiliously observe all the rituals of religion, he will believe all its doctrines, he will be most violently zealous against those whom he conceives to be erroneous. The ambitious, the covetous, the unjust, the voluptuous, will make any atonement, any compensation, which does not preclude him from the indulgence of his beloved vice; and by persuading himself that it will avail, he is lulled into a fatal security. Hence the characters in which the shifts of avarice, the tricks of dishonesty, the revellings of debauchery, or the arts of ambition, are unnaturally conjoined with a high profession

profession of religion, and a presumptuous conceit of extraordinary sanctity.

FINALLY, when habitual sinners can find no means of concealing from themselves the turpitude of those vices to which they are addicted, they notwithstanding reconcile their minds to the perpetration of them, by some imperfect motions of present repentance, or half-resolutions of future reformation. You condemn yourselves in what you do; you regret every act of sin as soon almost as it is done; you lament that you are not better, and wish earnestly that you were: and you hope that this is repentance, and shows your heart to be right, however faulty your conduct be. If there be any defect in this, you will supply it hereafter; you cannot think of encountering the difficulties of a complete reformation, at present; but at a more convenient season, when you have enjoyed your sins a little longer, you are determined that you will accomplish it. Strange! to pervert those checks and rebukes of conscience, which proclaim your guilt, into an evidence that you are guiltless! to dream that your sinning against conviction, is repentance! to conclude that God will not condemn you, because you cannot help condemning yourselves! Your resolutions are as full of absurdity as your sentiments:

sentiments: at the very time you are doing an action, you resolve to disapprove and condemn it afterwards; you resolve that hereafter, when it shall be impossible to undo it, you will heartily wish that undone, which you will not leave undone, now when it is absolutely in your power to abstain from doing it. A resolution to repent hereafter, is inconsistent with every degree of honesty of heart—and it never will be executed; every impediment to present reformation, every difficulty in effecting it, every reason for delay, will continue and daily gather strength. You may repeat, and again repeat your resolution to reform; but you will never set about actual reformation. While you regret that you are sinning, and yet go on; while you resolve to amend, and amend not immediately; you are the slaves of sin, and likely to die in bondage to it. *To-day, while it is called to-day, batten not your hearts*.*

WHEN we thus display the long train of wickedness which springs naturally and unavoidably from the least vicious indulgence, you perhaps consider it as in a great measure the work of imagination. You think you can easily go a short way in vice, when your plea-

* Heb. iii. 7, 8, 15.

sure

sure or your interest requires it, without any danger of becoming abandoned to it. You have already ventured on some acts of sin, but you are certain that you can forbear them when you please: you have yielded to your favourite vice, and you have found no necessary connexion between it and other vices. But can you say, that you have found no connexion? Perhaps you have not yet run into them. But have you not been sometimes tempted to them? Has never your customary sin hinted that you might make trial of them? Yes, but you abhor them. Rather than be guilty of them, you will renounce the most beloved vice. This may be your present opinion: after custom has effaced a man's detestation of familiar sins, he may continue to regard a higher degree, or another species of guilt with horror. But by a little longer practice, this likewise will be effaced, and that very guilt incurred without scruple. Recollect Hazael, and be alarmed for yourselves. You cannot feel stronger indignation against any crime, than he expressed when the Prophet foretold his future enormities. *Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing*?* His ambition was yet young, but it quickly rose to strength, and drove him into all the barba-

* 2 Kings viii. 13.

rities which he had so confidently disclaimed. The effects of wickedness are always carried far beyond the sinner's first design. Nothing could prevail upon you to leap from the top of a high tower; but by an easy scale of steps you will without fear descend to the very same depth. From the first wilful transgression to confirmation in wickedness, the descent is so easy that every transition is scarcely perceptible. One act of sin, in many ways induces the repetition of it; repetition necessarily forms a habit of it: the habit impels to frequent practice, and by practice becomes inveterate. The practice, the habit of one sin leads on to other sins; prepares the soul for greater crimes; begets temptations to them; demands them for concealing it; involves you in them as its inevitable consequences; or imposes them upon you as necessary for its support and execution; and quickly rears them also into established habits. Habitual vice lays you open to all the power of ill example, to all the influence of loose principles, to all the artifices of self-deceit; and by means of these, you will become irreclaimable, and yet fearless in all your vicious courses. Smooth, and often rapid, is the progress; but fatal is the issue.

How carefully then ought they, who have yet retained their innocence, still to hold it fast?

fast? You cannot guess beforehand, of what depravity, trouble, and misery, you lay the foundation, when you make the first step into a bad course. Fully retrieved it can never be. However early you retract it, it must be with pungent sorrow, with painful struggling, and with a consciousness of guilt never to be totally obliterated. But it is not probable that you will retract it early: a downward motion is not easily repressed. If you commit one sin, you can hardly avoid committing many more: if you commit many sins, you must contract strong vicious habits; and if these be once contracted, they will render you the irredeemable slaves of vice. It is with a trembling heart that the virtuous friend, or the attentive parent sees the inexperienced youth engaging in the commerce of the world; a few of his first steps may very probably determine his character through life, and his state through eternity.

How, then, shall we address those who have already proceeded far in vicious courses? Your condition is imminently dangerous. You are going straight forward in the road to destruction; and the farther you have gone, the more violently you are compelled to go farther. Stop short, while yet there is a possibility. However little a way you have proceeded,

ceeded; you will find abundant difficulty in returning; another step will make a great addition to it. You cannot pass at once from the path of vice into that of virtue; they touch only at their entrance; in their progress they separate to an unmeasurable distance: to cross into the path of virtue, will require more laborious and tedious exertions than you have made in wandering from it; it is like toiling up a steep ascent, where the sand is continually slipping from beneath your feet, and frustrates more than half your effort. By every hour's continuance in evil courses, the power of sin is strengthened, the vigour of the soul impaired, and the principles of reformation weakened. How seldom is the practised sinner perfectly recovered to virtue? *Be not therefore without fear, to add sin unto sin any more: make no tarrying to turn unto the Lord; and put not off from day to day: for suddenly shall the wrath of the Lord come forth, and in thy security thou shalt be destroyed, and perish in the day of vengeance*.* By immediate reformation you will prevent it: if you defer it for a day, it may be for ever beyond your power.

* Ecclus. v. 5. 7.

S E R M O N III.

THE PROGRESS OF VICE: THE THIRD STAGE.

J E R E M. ix. 3.

They proceed from evil to evil.

IT is a common prejudice against religion, that it is for some time difficult and painful, at least to such as have been formerly engaged in vicious courses, who must undergo a severe discipline of mortification and self-denial, before they can find any pleasure in it. Against religion it is but a prejudice; for its joys are more than sufficient to compensate all the pains which we can endure in acquiring a relish for them. But against vice, it is an unanswerable argument, that its beginnings occasion racking pains, which it has no solid joys to counterbalance. To every well-disposed mind, a heinous sin is at first the object of dread and horror. Before a man can think without reluctance of com-

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mitting it, before he can set about it without trepidation of heart and confusion of face, before he can reflect on it without pungent remorse and self-condemnation, he must not only suffer many an uneasy struggle within, between the irregular passions which urge him to it, and conscience which forbids it; but he must likewise, by many outward actions of baseness, intermingled with seasons of dissatisfaction and dread, wear out all the principles of modesty and ingenuity, which were the glory of his nature. By perseverance in wickedness, he may at length become easy in it: but his ease is only stupefaction in guilt, and security on the brink of destruction. It is founded in the corruption of his heart; it is always in proportion to the inveteracy of that corruption; it is the desperate period of a mortal distemper, in which a man is crushed beneath its power, thinks not of a remedy, or becomes fond of his disease. Instead of a recommendation of vice, it is one of the strongest arguments against it; and when we consider how insensibly, and almost unavoidably, the man who is once engaged in vice, is drawn forward to this state of mind, the argument becomes truly alarming. I have proposed to enforce it, by tracing out the sinner's progress *from evil to evil*. In pursuing this design, I have, *first*, pointed out those steps of mental
indulgence

indulgence by which irregular inclinations and vicious passions are inwardly cherished, till they break forth into overt acts of sin: and, *secondly*, those steps by which, in consequence of wilful sin, vicious habits are contracted, strengthened, and multiplied: and I shall now, in the *third* place, endeavour to describe the confirmation of the corrupted heart in profligate wickedness and enmity against religion.

IN pointing out the sinner's progress to habitual vice, we have observed that his aversion to it, his reluctance to practise it, and his pain in the consciousness of it, continually grow weaker. At length they are almost totally effaced; he becomes *insensible* to its baseness and its wretchedness. Insensibility in sin is the necessary consequence of being enured to it; and it forms a principal part of its maturity. Custom, which strengthens our active propensities, never fails to weaken passive impressions: the frequent sight of distress blunts the emotions of pity; the being often exposed to danger impairs the sensation of fear; the being long forced to bear insults and indignities, deadens the pungency of that mortification with which they are felt at first. The custom of committing sin wears off the the uneasiness, the shame, and the dread,

which the thought of it once produced. Conscience, which formerly eyed it with horror, remonstrated against it, and faithfully represented its baseness and its misery, becomes so blind that it cannot see the evil of sin, so heedless that it will not reprove it, or so debauched that it excuses and defends it. Its strongest checks and its sharpest rebukes have been despised or eluded, and now it ceases from them; it is become *seared with a hot iron**; it is reprobate and undiscerning. But were the conscience of the habitual sinner still capable of continuing its rebukes, and sounding them ever so loudly in his ears, he could not hear them; he has so often heard and disregarded them, that they can make no impression. He is like a person who, having always lived near to a noisy cataract, has lost the very perception of its roaring. Sin is of a benumbing, stupifying nature; in its earliest stages, the sinner slumbers; in its last stage, *the spirit of deep sleep is fallen upon him*†, a lethargy oppresses all his powers. He is *past feeling*‡. His mind is as a member of the body that is mortified; it has no sense of the most flagitious crimes. In the nervous language of Scripture, he is even *dead in trespasses*

* 1 Tim. iv. 2. † Isa. xxix. 10. ‡ Eph. iv. 19.

and sins *. Nay he has made his heart an *heart of stone* †, as an adamant stone, lest he should bear the law ‡.

IN this state of obduracy, the sinner can reflect upon the most heinous particulars of his abandoned conduct without sorrow or regret. Long custom of sinning has taken away the consciousness of his guilt. Remorse, which never fails to wound the tender heart of a novice in vice, cannot touch the callous soul of the proficient. The yoke of sin no longer galls his neck : he has *hardened* it ; he has *made it an iron sinew* §. Habituated to the slavery of sin, he forgets his chains. In a condition which by all the declarations of the gospel excludes him from the happiness of heaven, and which in its own nature renders him incapable of happiness, he sits down secure and unconcerned, without a desire of reformation, without one thought of altering his course.

WHEN the sinner can make himself easy under the load of guilt which he has already contracted, he will likewise go on without reluctance to contract new guilt. The same depravity which smothers remorse for former

* Chap. ii. 1. † Ezek. xxxvi. 26. ‡ Zech. vii. 12.
§ Jer. vii. 26. Isa. xlviii. 4.

crimes, precludes repugnance to fresh transgressions. Whenever conscience ceases from its rebukes, it of course gives over its remonstrances. As often as an opportunity occurs, the hardened sinner runs into vice without thought, without almost knowing that he is doing wrong. He has freed himself from every restraint. By his being so long addicted to what is base, his conscience is silenced, his detestation and dread of sin, his sense of its vile and shameful nature, and his apprehensions of its miserable consequences, are in a great measure lost. He thinks neither of the goodness of God, nor of his wrath. He regards not the obligations of virtue, nor any of the motives of the gospel. The modesty, which he possessed in his early wanderings from duty, has forsaken him; he has no respect to his own character, or to the opinion of others; he abandons himself to sin in broad day-light, without a mask, without a blush. It must be a very atrocious deed from which he will start back. He is like those who are reported to have rendered poison so familiar to them, by the custom of swallowing it, that they could digest a great quantity of it without any sensation of pain. By a course of rebellion against conscience, he has not only broken its power, but learned to despise its authority.

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By being long habituated to vice, a man becomes not only insensible, but likewise *inflexible* and irreclaimable. These two characters are so closely connected, that the Scripture includes both under the same term, *hardness of heart*. Both are clearly discernible in the descriptions which it gives of the obduracy with which the Prophets and the Messiah so often charge the degenerate Jews. Of the insensibility which we have just now described, obstinate adherence to vice is the necessary consequence. In every nature there is originally a principle of self-restoration; when it is a little put out of order, it labours to recover itself. Storms and tempests are the agitations of the elements endeavouring to discharge the noxious vapours which have infected them; and they are succeeded by a wholesome calm. Agues and fevers in the human body, are the struggles of its remaining vigour to expel some malignant humours which threaten its dissolution; and when they cease without producing this effect, a broken constitution or speedy death ensues. Vice is the disorder, the disease, the misery of moral agents: as long as the mind retains any soundness, it makes efforts to throw it off: regret, remorse, self-condemnation, consideration of the reasons for virtue, resolutions of amendment, are no other than its motions to-

wards repentance, its endeavours after reformation. When by perseverance in wickedness they are suppressed, the very principle of self-restitution is lost, the distemper is incurable. When a man is unaffected with all the sins which he has committed, how can he think of forsaking them? When he has no sense of the evil of sin, how can he be brought to abhor and avoid it? His sleep will be a perpetual sleep. To arouse him, would be to give feeling to a mortified limb, or motion to a dead carcase. He is blind to all moral considerations: he is impenetrable by exhortation, by reproof, by the mercies, by the judgments of God, by all incentives to amendment. There is nothing remaining in his soul on which they can take hold. In spite of all possible motives to virtue, he has obstinately pursued his wicked courses; they could not restrain him when they operated with their full force; how then can they reclaim him now, when, by being often baffled, they have lost their force; and when, by the inveteracy of habit, he is steeled against them? In a Christian, hardness of heart has been contracted in contempt of all the means of recovery which the gospel can supply: they might reform a heathen; but for correcting his depravity, a new revelation, of greater efficacy than the gospel, would seem to be necessary. None such will be given;
and

and therefore the apostle affirms that *it is impossible*, he cannot mean less than that it is so difficult as scarcely to be expected, *for those who are once enlightened, if they shall fall away, so far as to become obdurate sinners, to renew them again unto repentance* *. Were they even indulged with a new revelation, it is not probable that they would repent. After the Jews had, in contempt of Moses and the Prophets, become obdurate in wickedness, the gospel was granted to them; but they trampled it likewise under foot, remained impenitent, and made a dreadful addition to their guilt.

THE inflexibility of the hardened sinner is secured, not only by his insensibility, but by the strength of his vicious habits. How difficult it is to break off any habit even the most insignificant, the experience of every day proclaims. A confirmed habit few have resolution to attempt eradicating. The labour, the care, the constancy of vigilance which it requires, is almost incredible. After the pains of years, it is discovered that some fibre has remained, which shoots anew, and demands a repetition of the toil. How then can deep-rooted habits of vice be extirpated? Could the hardened sinner feel the whole

* Heb. vi. 4, 6.

force of all the arguments for undertaking the extirpation of them, they scarcely could prevail. His habits are become too stubborn to bend before them; they are too much indurated to yield to the edge of reason. By length of time, the habits of the mind, as well as the members of the body, become stiff and rigid. The man who has through life accustomed himself to sin, is chained fast by his lusts; and in chains, what can he do for his own release? He has not the power to reform, though he had the inclination. He has gone so far, that he is frightened at the length and ruggedness of the way by which he must return; he doubts whether it be possible; despondence suspends all his powers, and deprives him of all heart to purpose it. The Scripture therefore describes hardened sinners as not only *abominable and disobedient*, but also *unto every good work reprobate* *; so far alienated from the life of God, as to have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness †; in the snare of the Devil, taken captive by him at his will ‡. The stain of sin may sink so deep as to tincture the soul throughout. The habit of wickedness becomes a second nature; the whole propension of the heart is as much to sin, as the tendency of a stone to

* Tit. i. 16. † Eph. iv. 18, 19. ‡ 2 Tim. ii. 26.

fall, or of sparks to fly upwards; to correct it, is almost as difficult as to alter the original powers of the mind. By wallowing in sensuality, men may be degraded into beasts: by resigning themselves to malevolence, they may be transformed into fiends. The incorrigible obstinacy of habitual sinners, and the desperate danger of their condition is emphatically expressed by the Prophet; *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil**. But if you will observe with what composure and perseverance you see the miser continuing his penurious shifts, the rapacious multiplying his rapines, the unjust executing his villanies, the drunkard repeating his debauches, the profligate of every denomination pursuing his own course to the very last, you can scarcely imagine even that description to be exaggerated.

Is it then impossible that they who have become hardened in vicious courses, should be reclaimed from them? *With men, I am afraid, we must determine this is impossible, but with God all things are possible†*. It can be effected only by an extraordinary measure of divine grace: but they have no reason to expect so much as the ordinary influences of

* Jer. xiii. 23.

† Mat. xix. 26.

grace. They are totally estranged from the means which he has appointed for conveying it: how can they find access to it? They have continually resisted the spirit of God, and in defiance of all his motions proceeded to so extreme depravity; he will be provoked to cease from his suggestions, and to withdraw his aids. They have so long refused to hearken to the voice of God, that he will give *them up unto their own hearts lusts, to walk in their own counsels* *. He will employ no farther methods for their reformation. *Why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more* †. *He that beareth, let him bear; and he that forbeareth let him forbear* ‡: *he that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still* §. When Divine justice thus pronounceth concerning the habitual sinner, his condition is irretrievable. Without Divine grace, he cannot be awakened even to think of repenting; without a great degree of its assistance he cannot accomplish his repentance; but he has totally forfeited its aids. *That which is crooked in him cannot be made straight* ||. His perversity will increase every day; and *after his hardness and impeni-*

* Psal. lxxxi. 12.

† Isa. i. 5.

‡ Ezek. iii. 27.

§ Rev. xxii. 11.

|| Eccl. i. 15.

tent heart, he treasureth up unto himself wrath against the day of wrath.*

By long custom of sinning, men become not only blind to the evil of sin, and confirmed in the practice of it, but likewise fond of it. They not only commit it, but approve it, and glory in it. *Even their mind and conscience is defiled†*: their moral sentiments are totally reversed: *they call evil good, and good evil, and put darkness for light, and light for darkness‡*. They have so transfigured their vices, and so vitiated their judgment, as to reckon them commendable. They have so audaciously trampled upon obligation, that they applaud themselves in despising it. They forget that ever they heard the voice of conscience, and therefore persuade themselves that its dictates are impostures, and that virtue and vice are empty names. *Fools make a mock at sin§*, and turn duty unto ridicule. The drunkard boasts of his beastly debauches, and laughs at temperance, as an insipid, dull precision. The dissolute libertine triumphs in the multitude of his impurities, and sneers at modesty as spiritless austerity. The practised villain pours contempt on the restraints

* Rom. ii. 5.

† Tit. i. 15.

‡ Isa. v. 20.

§ Prov. xiv. 9.

of justice, and values himself on the boldness with which he has broken through them, the skill with which he has eluded them, the address with which he has screened himself from the vengeance of the laws, and the opulence which he possesses in consequence of his crimes. The irreligious jeers at the fervours of devotion as mere enthusiasm, at the regular performance of its duties as ceremonious formality, weak superstition, or studied hypocrisy; and exults in his own impiety as refinement of spirit, and superiority of mind. The sinner of every class, when he has pursued his evil courses to a great length, sets himself down *in the seat of the scornful* *, and makes right and wrong the subjects of his slight, his mirth, or his satire.

In the earlier periods of their degeneracy, men sometimes venture to treat particular acts of virtue or vice with derision, or even to jest with the sanctity and the importance of moral obligation. In that case, it is the effusion of unthinking levity; it is the ill-judged affectation of wit and pleasantry; it is the heedless mimicry of the profane scoffer; it is an assumed disguise of inward pangs from consciousness of guilt; or it is a fond attempt

* Psal. i. 1.

to obtain tranquillity in vices which they have not resolution to forsake. It is belied by the real sentiments of their hearts, and intermixt with checks of conscience and misgivings of soul. From whatever cause it proceeds, it is foolish and highly culpable; and it is of the most pernicious consequence. It gradually saps the authority of conscience, lessens the power of its decrees, wears off the reverence due to virtue, and prepares the way for regarding sin as a light and trivial failing. But in the veteran sinner, it proceeds from causes which lie deeper, and it implies the blackest corruption. His temper is a contradiction to virtue; and therefore he hates it, and supports his hatred by representing it as contemptible. Vice has interwoven itself with all the exertions of his soul; and therefore he studiously justifies and commends it. His scoffing is not the unmeaning jest of giddiness, but the designing sneer of malignity. It is the effect of that false peace which, by smothering his sense of right and wrong, he has obtained in adding sin to sin. It is indulged with eagerness and complacency; *the scorners delight in their scorning* *. Such perversion of heart precludes almost the possibility of repentance. It empoids all the springs from which repentance

* Prov. i. 22.

can proceed: it throws ridicule on all the sentiments which can instigate to reformation. When a man has long addicted himself to any course, this alone is often sufficient to make him ashamed to alter it: but when he has moreover set himself, on every occasion, to maintain and applaud it, to expose and vilify the contrary course, and to deride those who pursue it, how can he have the courage to resolve upon amendment? His jests would be all retorted on himself: he must encounter not the scoffs of others only, but his own. He hates to be reformed.

SCOFFING at the practice of religion, is sometimes united with belief of its principles. They who would think with horror of denying the existence of God, glory in living *without God in the world**. They who would shudder at disbelieving a future state, laugh at that conduct which alone can qualify them for happiness in it. They who retain considerable reverence for the truths of the gospel of Christ, treat with contempt a *conversation becoming the gospel*†. The inconsistency, the absurdity of their character is astonishing: they deride what their avowed principles demand as indispensable; they boast of what their own principles demonstrate to be their disgrace and

* Eph. ii. 12. † Phil. i. 27.

misery. It shews to what a deplorable pitch vice can infatuate the soul: it besets it into such stupidity, that it cannot discern the most palpable repugnances.

BUT very often the derision of the scorner extends itself to the principles of religion. The most sacred, venerable and important truths, the being of God, the external state of retribution, the divinity of the gospel, its excellence, its sublime doctrines, its precious promises, its awful threatenings, are made the chosen objects of his scurrilous wit and dissolute mirth. If any of these have been misunderstood through the weakness of believers, the undesigned misrepresentation is greedily laid hold of, unfairly substituted in place of the reality, exaggerated to the utmost that it may the better receive the false colouring of ridicule. In every step of his progress *from evil to evil*, the sinner is gradually trained to this extremity of corruption; and by obduracy in wickedness, he is completely prepared for it. The sportiveness of childhood and the vivacity of youth, uncorrected by reverence for religious truth, is sometimes found to overflow in an indecent jest on some principle which ought to be regarded as sacred, and never mentioned but with seriousness. Its being heard without

marks of disgust, received with satisfaction, or echoed back with the voice of mirth, is an encouragement to the repetition of it. By such communication men become indisposed to sedateness, and fond of frivolous and jocular discourse. The novice in vice, panting for liberty to gratify his indulged passions, or to palliate from himself, and justify to others, the deviations into which they have betrayed him, catches at the licentious positions or the ludicrous images which he has learned from the proficient in wickedness, inculcates them on his recoiling heart, and produces them with seeming complacency, but often with real compunction and mistrust. When, after having plunged himself into vice, his conscience upbraids him, and holds up to his view the great truths which condemn his conduct, and proclaim his danger, he labours to evade their force, by whatever can disguise their certainty, or debase their importance. Intent on silencing conscience, he necessarily directs his efforts against the truths from which it draws its sharpest weapons: and if he be successful in silencing it, there can be nothing to check him in throwing off the belief of these truths. When he has become determined and contumacious in his vices, he must be impatient of every restraint. The tenets of religion are all

doctrines

doctrines according to godliness *, contradictory to every vice. The abandoned to vice would gladly disbelieve them: to confute them by arguments, is above his power; to destroy his reverence for them, by profane scoffing, is an easier task, and will almost as effectually secure his peace, or perhaps facilitate his infidelity. Inveterate habits of wickedness cannot fail to set men in opposition to religion which is incompatible with them. This is the very account which our Saviour gives of the contempt and malice with which the Jews treated his instructions: *They loved darkness rather than light: Why? Because their deeds were evil; for every one that doth evil hateth the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd* †. Two of the Apostles ascribe to the same cause, the impious mocking which, they foretel, was to take place in after-ages: *There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own ungodly lusts, sensual, having not the spirit* ‡.

If the person who extends his invective or his ridicule to the principles of religion, avoids the inconsistency chargeable on him who laughs only at the practice of it, he is guilty of an equal, though dissimilar, absurdity,

* 1 Tim. vi. 3. † John iii. 19, 20. ‡ 2 Pet. iii. 3.
Jude 18, 19.

ty, and he shews deeper depravity of mind. To misrepresent the tenets of religion, is not wit, but folly. To be incapable of shining, except by means of irreligion, betrays a want of parts. To condemn the most venerable things, and to be merry with the most serious, shows a shameful perversion of taste and sentiment. To affect exposing by banter, what you cannot confute by argument, and what you have never examined with diligence, implies a heart lost to every thing that is ingenuous in human nature. If the principles of religion be true, their importance must be confessed: nothing short of a demonstration of their falsity can justify your treating them either with spite or with levity: but the utmost effrontery of infidelity dare not boast of such a demonstration.

WHEN men have contracted enmity against the truths of religion, and accustomed themselves to treat them with contempt and derision, how can they be reclaimed from wickedness? God works repentance in sinners by his grace: but he works it in a manner suitable to their reasonable nature. He does not convert them by force, as *the ships are turned about with a helm, whithersoever the governor listeth*, or as *we put bits in the horses mouths*

*moũths, that they may obey us**: He operates upon them by principles of reason, he persuades them by means of truths which infer the obligations of virtue. But all these they regard as fables, fit only to be laughed at. Enured to despise the only means of amendment, incapable of feeling their force, they must be fixt in their impenitence. *A scorner beareth not rebuke†*, nor can be touched with exhortation. Will God in some extraordinary way, for all ordinary ways are rendered ineffectual, awaken him to serious reflexion? God himself has been the object of his blasphemy. Will the compassion of the Son of God exert itself to soften the obduracy and correct the perversity of his soul? The Son of God he reviles as an impostor. Will the Holy Spirit, by an irresistible impulse of his grace, renew his corrupted heart? It has been his constant practice to *do despite unto the spirit of grace‡*. His condition is determined, his ruin is almost inevitable.

If the degree of wickedness hitherto described be susceptible of any aggravation, it is when the sinner makes it his business to seduce others into vicious courses: and it never fails to lead him forward to this summit of

* Jam. iii. 3, 4.

† Prov. xiii. 1.

‡ Heb. x. 29.

guilt. To assimilate others to ourselves, is a desire natural to the soul. When men are determined to persist in their vices, and have laid aside every thought of reforming themselves, they will become intent on perverting others into the same evil courses, and forming them to the like character. Many vices can be practised only in society: the man who is addicted to them, must search for fit associates, and if he meets not with such as of choice *run with him to the same excess of riot*, he must, for enjoying his own vices, draw them on to it. Many vices cannot yield their full measure of advantage to him who delights in them, except they be likewise practised by others: the ruling passion of the miser receives a direct gratification from the parsimony of all who depend upon him, as well as from his own penuriousness, and will therefore instigate him to model them according to his own maxims: dishonesty of every species requires accomplices or instruments for executing its schemes, and must fashion them to its purposes, by debauching them from all the principles of justice. Every vice is kept in countenance by numbers, and no vice is so completely satisfied with itself, even in the most degenerate nature, as not to grasp eagerly

at this appearance of patronage, and labour to procure it. A vitiated palate takes pleasure in the vilest favours, a disordered mind is gratified by the most improper objects; and a heart depraved into the love of vice, cannot but feel an unnatural satisfaction in its prevalence. To see others yielding to his influence, or copying after his example, though it be in wickedness, gives the profligate an opinion of his own authority and importance, that flatters the illegitimate and inverted pride for which his profligacy has prepared him. So great is the corruption into which human nature may fall by continuance in vice, that some find a positive and ultimate delight in seducing the thoughtless, corrupting the innocent, and encouraging the timid sinner to go greater lengths. They will persuade or delude them into the most atrocious crimes. They will scruple no method by which it can be accomplished. They content not themselves with spreading vice by the most flagrant example: they recommend it; they set it off to the best advantage; they employ all their art to produce enchanting pictures of it; they point out the way to it; they lead the reluctant by the hand into its darkest retreats; they sedulously mock at whatever might prove a restraint from it. Like the Jews who were *hardened* against the true religion,

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they

they *speake evil of that way before the multitude* *. Their enmity against religion is too rancorous to be confined within their own breasts; it is not purely to gratify themselves that they pour it out; they proclaim it with a fixt design, and an anxious desire to communicate it to others. They direct all their scoffs to the propagation of iniquity. Shocking as this degree of wickedness is, there have been many instances of it in every age. Solomon describes it in several passages of his writings. Evil men *speake froward things, who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness, who rejoyce to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked* †. They say, *let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent, let us swallow them up alive, as the grave, and whole, as those that go down into the pit* ‡. They sleep not except they have done mischief, and their sleep is taken away unless they cause some to fall §. It is the temper of the fiend transplanted into the human breast: it is to perform the vilest of the devil. Go, and find amusement in the horrors of the wretch who is hastening to the torture: it were less inhuman than to sport with what must incur the wrath of God, or to take pleasure in betraying men to the

* Acts xix. 9.

† Prov. ii. 12, 13, 14.

‡ Chap. i. 11, 12.

§ Chap. iv. 16.

perpetration of it. The prostituted pander to wickedness, must be nearly past redemption. A conscience so thoroughly debauched cannot be restored to a vigorous sense of guilt: a heart so completely obdurate cannot feel its sting. The guilt is so dreadfully accumulated, that a lively sense of it, instead of impelling him to repentance, would most probably overwhelm him with despair, in thinking of the multitude of his sins, and the numbers whom he has contributed to contaminate and ruin. He ventures not to hope for mercy; he cannot bring himself to pray for it; his soul cannot frame a wish from which it has been so long and so far alienated. By the hardness of his heart, he knows that God withholds his grace. If he feels that in all this God is just, it aggravates his torture: the long suffering of God abused and exhausted, the purchase of Christ rejected and forfeited, oppresses him with unsufferable anguish. If he acquit not God from the charge of dealing hardly with him, he *sets his mouth against the heavens* *, he vents his rage in blasphemies, he curses God, and dies.

I HAVE NOW traced out the natural progress of vice from its slenderest beginnings to its

* Psal. lxxiii. 9.

baneful issue. In the preceding discourses, I delineated the train of inward indulgences and deceits by which passion is rendered irregular, and put forth into acts of sin; and the manner in which, from acts of sin, habits of depravity spring up, and grow, and multiply: and in the present, I have described that hardness of heart, and that contempt and hatred of religion, which necessarily result from confirmed and multiplied habits of wickedness, and complete the corruption of the sinner. It is a shocking, a confounding object. It cannot be beheld without horror. If any of you shudder at it, be careful to turn your terror to your own advantage. It inculcates the most important lessons in the most alarming manner, especially when it is considered in connexion with the several gradations which, from the first deviation into vice, almost imperceptibly lead forward to it.

THE whole of this subject serves as an awful warning to those who are so happy as not to be yet engaged in any vicious course. I cannot conclude it, without again beseeching the young and the innocent to guard against the first deviation from virtue, however small it may appear, and however strong you may think the inducements to it. Give no credit to its infant smiles; admit not a wish for the pleasure

sure or the profit which it promises: they are a lie; its end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword*. In vain you think of sinning in moderation, of setting bounds to your transgressions, of going only a certain length, but no farther: you might as well attempt to restrain the raging of the ocean. Vice creeps on by little steps, but with an uninterrupted progression. By the smallest failure in care and recollection, you will slide from what is lawful, into what is suspicious; from that into what is plainly sinful; from lesser into greater transgressions; from acts into customary practice; from strong inclinations into deliberate habits; from one habit into another; from less to more inveteracy; from the practice of wickedness to the love of it. The connexion between the slightest vicious indulgence, and the blackest guilt, though formed by many links, is indissoluble. To what vigilance against the smallest trespass would an adequate sense of this determine us? Labour to acquire and to preserve the liveliest sense of it. Avoid every object which can excite the faintest inclination to a forbidden course; fly from every situation which can assist its operation. Give no wilful indulgence so much as to a sinful thought, or an evil imagination;

* Prov. iv. 4.

consent not, even in your hearts, to the demands of any irregular passion. To restrain the extravagance of thought, and to check the first rising of unlawful passion, is the easiest, as well as the surest, means of preventing hardness of heart and future misery. It will require intense and constant care; but if this be neglected, to repent, to keep you in the state of penitence, to preserve you from relapses into sin, will require much more painful vigilance. The strongest inclination to sin, which you can feel at present, bears no proportion to the violence of desire to persist and to go on in sin, which will torment you, if you once enter into its ways. If you suffer yourselves to contract a vicious habit, for conquering it, you must lay yourselves under harder restraints than would now be necessary, and deny yourselves many things which now you might safely use; and you will be less disposed and less able to apply the remedy. *Take heed, therefore, brethren, that ye begin not to depart from the living God*.*

BUT, alas! how many of us have already begun to depart from him? How many of us have already departed far from him? Return without delay. In whatever part of your sin-

* Heb. iii. 12.

ful progress you may be, the present is the fittest season that ever you will find for reformation. If you return not, you must go on; if you grow not better, you must grow worse; there is no possibility of your being stationary. Next to escaping sin, is quickly to forsake it. To forsake it the most quickly, is far more difficult than to have avoided it, but will become every day more difficult and more precarious. The diseases of the soul, as well as of the body, are easiest to be cured at first; by continuance they become more obstinate; and by long continuance a slight ailment may grow to such a head as to baffle the most powerful medicine. While the sinner only slumbers, a slight touch will rouse him: if he falls asleep, it will require a strong pull to awaken him: but if he sinks into a lethargy, what force is sufficient to remove it? and if he is dead in sin, what but a miracle can raise him to spiritual life? I will say to every one of you, set about your reformation immediately, and God will enable you to accomplish it. But I must likewise say, if you delay it for one hour, it may very soon be impossible. If this moment you disregard the checks of conscience, refuse the calls of the gospel, and resist the motions of the spirit; think not that you will yield to them hereafter. Every time they are felt and disregarded, their influence will be weakened. If this day they produce a purpose to repent in a little, to-morrow they will

will produce a fainter design to repent at a more distant time ; and very soon they will produce no intention ever to repent. *To-day, if ye will hear his voice, if ye would ever listen to it, to-day harden not your hearts**. If you continue to harden them, the time will come when, if you should happen to be alarmed to a sense of your guilt, your souls will be overwhelmed with such desponding thoughts as these : my condition is desperate ; the labour of extirpating habits so deeply rooted would be insurmountable ; I have not the resolution to attempt it ; God has doubtless long ago withdrawn his grace, else I could not have sinned so heinously ; he has given me up to judicial hardness ; it were presumption for so provoking an offender to hope for his forgiveness of the past, or his assistance for the future ; there remaineth nothing for me, but the *fearful looking for of judgment* †. Then your reformation will be barely possible ; it would be almost miraculous ; but what reason has the daring sinner to expect a miracle ? *Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near* ‡.

WHETHER you have avoided vicious courses, or whether you have forsaken them, be careful

* Heb. iii. 7, 8. † Chap. x. 27. ‡ Isa. lv. 6.

constantly to maintain a deep abhorrence of every vice. Reckon nothing trivial that is in any degree sinful. When we consider how fatal the end of sin is, and yet how inconsiderable its beginning, and how imperceptible its advances, we have reason to tremble. From an unavoidable propension, it proceeds first to sinful delight, then to actual transgression; and from acts to habits, till the whole soul be corrupted and exasperated against all truth and goodness. To guard ourselves against the subtlety of its insinuations, and the force of its attacks, we must keep its malignity and its misery continually in our view. Be at pains to preserve your conscience tender and delicately sensible. Whenever it warns or reproves you, hearken to it. Attempt not to drown its voice by the noise of mirth, or to suppress it by the multiplicity of worldly cares. Improve its admonitions by obedience, and seek not to get rid of its rebukes, except by repentance.

IN so difficult a work as it plainly is, to avoid the encroachments of sin, let us not trust wholly to our own management. To the most attentive circumspection and the most strenuous endeavours, let us add dependance on the assistance of God's grace. In a road so full of danger, and so beset with snares,
surely

surely it is not in man that walketh, to direct his steps*; it cannot be safe to travel alone, without a guide and without a helper. To preserve us from the path of destruction, and to uphold us in the way of life, we must earnestly implore the aid of the Almighty, humbly trust in it, and secure its continuance by improving it.

I SHALL conclude with calling your attention to the apostle's injunction, *Exhort one another daily, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*†. Christianity considers mankind as intimately related; and enjoins all its followers to be concerned, not for themselves only, but each also for another, especially in what regards their eternal interests. While the hardened sinner and the scoffer is assiduous in perverting the innocent, can he be a friend to virtue who will do nothing to confirm them? Every man has some opportunities of checking the growth of vice in others: and it is his duty to employ these opportunities; and by hints and suggestions, by warnings or admonitions, by reproofs, by every method consistent with prudence and propriety, to discourage vicious practices. It is a duty which elders owe especially to the

* Jer. x. 23. † Heb. iii. 13.

younger,

younger, the parent to his children, the superior to his dependents. Were it conscientiously discharged, it must have great effect. Its being a duty, implies that it is likewise the duty of each to comply with the exhortation of another, in evading the cunning, and resisting the power of sin. It is the most important service: let us all avail ourselves of it. *He that refuseth instruction, despiseth his own soul; but he that heareth reproof, getteth understanding, and abideth among the wise* *.

* Prov. xv. 31, 32.

younger, the parent is his friend and his
teacher in his department. We are a generation with
one eye, a mark and a goal. The being
of a child implies that it is a creature of the day and
each to comply with the education of and
that in every day's journey, and within the
power of his mind is the most important
even for small children of it. It is the
parent's duty to make the child's life a
life of the day, and to make the child's
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S E R M O N IV.

THE DESIRE OF LONG LIFE UN-
REASONABLE AND PERNICIOUS.

J O B, vii. 16.

I would not live alway.

THE desire of life is common to all animals; and it is the strongest principle in every nature. In other animals, it is wholly instinctive: in man, the instinct is strengthened by sentiment, and supported by reflexion. In the day of high health and prosperity, when our pleasures are many, and our sorrows few, when we indulge sanguine hopes, and listen not to the suggestions of fear, life seems to have charms sufficient to justify a warm attachment to it. A person cut off in these circumstances is always the object of our tenderest regret. When the support of a family, or the establishment of friends, depends on a person's life, he feels himself instigated by benevolence to earnest

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wishes for its long continuance. The sense of guilt, cloathing eternity with terrors, raises the love of life to the utmost pitch of anxiety. The self-condemned grasp eagerly at another day, as a respite from perdition, and would gladly prolong this earthly life for ever.

THE love of life continues strong, even when it is opposed by sentiment, and disproved by reflexion. There may be moments in the life of most men, in which they imagine that it is extinguished: but they are very few; and in these few, men only *imagine* that they have got rid of it. Under the first shock or the violent pressure of a great calamity, they cry out that life is not worth the living. But at that very instant, if they were put to the trial, they would be found unwilling to resign it; and no sooner is the weight of their affliction abated, than they shew as strong a passion for life as before. They suppose themselves indifferent about life, when they are weary of its distresses. The desire of life is far from being extinct, even in him who can taste no satisfaction in his present condition, and who regards all that is past as vanity. Of the most discontented, of the most disconsolate heart, the first wish always is for a life of greater enjoyment, and free from the wants and disappointments which
have

have hitherto been felt. *O spare me, that I may recover strength before I go hence and be no more**: make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years in which we have seen evil†; are the prayers to which nature prompts men, even when they are most broken by the violence of distress, or most exhausted by its continuance. Averse as we are to pain, we scruple not to redeem life at the expence of very grievous pain. When a man has drawn life to the very dregs, when old age has deprived him of every comfort, loaded him with numberless infirmities, and left him no possibility of better days, still he is willing to live a little longer. If in any case the love of this earthly life be wholly lost, yet the desire of existence remains, and would make the thought of annihilation horrible. To seem to be reconciled to non-existence, is only a phrenzy, in which the principles of nature are confounded by disease, suppressed by the violence of passion, smothered by depravity of heart, or perverted by false opinions.

RELIGION itself can seldom conquer the desire of prolonging life. The man into whom it has infused the most enchanting

* Psal. xxxix. 13. † Psal. xc. 15.

ideas and the liveliest hope of the celestial joys, generally thinks of his dissolution, notwithstanding, with some reluctance. He finds himself *in a strait betwixt two*. To depart and to be with Christ, he knows, is far better *; he desires it ardently: but he cannot bring himself to be fully satisfied that the desire should be instantly accomplished; a wish starts up, *to abide in the flesh* † for a little while, and when it is repressed, soon starts up again. If in any, the power of religion has totally subdued the love of life, and eradicated every degree of aversion to death, the principle is not destroyed; it has but changed its form; the desire of living in this state, is only supplanted by the desire of living in a better state.

IN my text, Job disclaims every wish to lengthen out his days. It was amidst the early assaults of deep, complicated, and seemingly irremediable distress. His *flesh was clothed with worms, and clods of dust*; his *skin was broken and become loathsome* ‡: he was in misery, and bitter in soul; and his roarings were poured out like the waters §. His friend, instead of soothing his sorrows, had raised them into agonies, by cruel reproaches, pronounced as

* Phil. i. 23.

† Ver. 24.

‡ Job, vii. 5.

§ Chap. iii. 20, 24.

well-weighed accusations, and with a provoking confidence; *to this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good**. His expression bears plain marks of the source from which it flowed; it is the language of fretfulness and impatience; it betrays an excess of vehemence: *I loath it, I would not live alway; let me alone, for my days are vanity.* He acknowledges that he spake it *in the anguish of his spirit, and complained in the bitterness of his soul*†. This was his infirmity. Religion neither approves a peevish disgust at life, nor requires us to extirpate all desire of it. A desire which is founded in instinct, and strengthened by almost all our passions, which clings fast to us in every condition, and assumes every form rather than quit its hold, neither can nor ought to be exterminated. It must be necessary; it must be subservient to very important purposes. Nevertheless it may become excessive; and its excess may be hurtful. Reason, therefore, and religion, will concur in requiring us to govern it: and they present arguments sufficient to determine us, and principles sufficient to enable us, to restrain it within its proper limits. In order to repress the wish *for living alway*, in order to excite you to con-

* Job, v. 27. † Chap. vii, 11.

quer an excessive fondness for long life, I shall prove,

FIRST, That long life is in many respects undesireable; and,

SECONDLY, That the immoderate desire of it is pernicious.

FIRST, That long life is in many respects undesireable, may be evinced by arguments drawn—from the general nature of human life,—from the peculiar attendants of long life;—and from the superior happiness of the future life.

1. THE general nature of human life leads us to reflexions which may reasonably check an eager passion for length of days. *I would not live alway, for my days are vanity.*—I wish not to exaggerate the evils of life: it cannot serve any good purpose. If the inconsiderate and gay paint its joys in too gaudy colours, the peevish and dejected succeed as much in their gloomy portraits of its sorrows. Complaints of the vanity and insipidity of this world, have an appearance of religion: but whenever they are carried beyond the truth, they are offences against religion, and they injure

injure it. It is pious to extol the future world; the present will not bear to be compared with it: but to depreciate the present as unworthy of the God who made it, cannot possibly be pious. It is pious to breathe ardent desires of the glories of heaven: but there is no piety in sullen contempt of those benefits which the God of heaven showers down upon the earth. Heavenly-mindedness is a noble temper; it refines and exalts the soul: but chagrin and dissatisfaction with the world, is a pitiful disposition which contracts and sours the spirit, and produces many vices. To blacken human life, is to defame its Author; it obstructs resignation to his will; and is incompatible with gratitude for his mercies. The deficiencies of this life are numerous and great enough to intimate that man is intended for a better life: but if this life were a series of unmixt distresses, where would be the evidence of that divine goodness which alone can support the hope of a better? The inequalities of the present state are such as require a future retribution; but if it be absolute confusion, without a mark of wise or righteous government, it can afford no proof of that justice, from which only a retribution can proceed. When the Scripture asserts that life is *vanity*, it means not that it is altogether sorrow, or void of all enjoyment: on the

contrary, both by its precepts, and by the examples of the Saints, it teaches us, that in every state we may *be content* *, that in the worst situation we may *be patient* †, that *all the days of our appointed time* we may *wait, till our change come* ‡. When old age, with assumed authority, preaches to youth, that life contains nothing at all worth seeking after, it only utters its own regret that life is over. Undistinguishing censures of the condition of man, always are either the murmurings of discontent, or the unfelt language of affectation. They have no sanction from genuine experience. Each of you has had many griefs; but each of you has likewise had many joys. If a moment of deep distress obliterates the sense of former pleasures, a moment of gladness banishes the remembrance of past distress. If the memory of some great affliction recurs at intervals for years, and occasions hours of sighing, yet with these are mingled days of ease, and even of cheerfulness. Afflictions which, we think at their first onset, must put a period to our earthly comfort, are so much mellowed by time, as to become very tolerable, and to admit the partnership of many pleasures. Under the acuteness of bodily pain, the pangs of disap-

* Phil. iv. 11.

† Jam. v. 7,—11.

‡ Job xiv. 14.

pointment,

pointment, the anguish of grief, the heart can find no peace: but in the life of every man, how small a proportion have the moments thus embittered, born to his happier days? It is not more certain that this world cannot satisfy all our desires, than that it gratifies many of them. Let us not dissemble the favours of our Maker; let us not unthankfully vilify the enjoyments which he bestows; let us not fretfully aggravate the evils which he has mingled in the cup of life. If the heart can really go along with the overcharged descriptions of unalleviated misery, in which ill-humour indulges itself, they will corrupt it. If they can make any determinate impression, it must be a bad impression. In consequence of it, that desire which God hath made the strongest in our nature, would appear to be an absolute absurdity; it would seem to be at variance with our whole condition. We must fall into stupid indifference, sullen disgust, or dejecting tiredness of life. These are dispositions which religion reprobates. It acknowledges only such moderation in the love of life, as the just estimate of it can authorize.

WE may consider life as it really is, we may even turn up its fairest side, and yet find abundant reason both for checking the ardor
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and for contracting the limits of our desire of life.—This life cannot be a state of *perfect* enjoyment. It is not adequate to the capacity of the soul; it necessarily leaves a sense of deficiency, which would require something nobler to fill it up. We wish to vary our enjoyments: but the number of them is limited, and their frequent recurrence begets satiety. Most of them grow first insipid, and then distasteful. What gave us pleasure by its presence, we often despise upon reflexion. Our relish varies; what at one time attached us to life, a little after we count of no value. It is lawful to desire life for the sake of its enjoyments; but because its enjoyments are, to our experience, imperfect, it must be unreasonable to desire it with anxiety, or to wish to protract it to its extremest length.—This life cannot be a state even of *pure* enjoyment. Its sunshine is broken by many intervals of rain and tempest. Uneasiness of mind, pain of body, and distress in outward circumstances, make weeping often suddenly to follow laughter. The heart sometimes feels pleasure and pain at once: it regrets one want, while it rejoices in the supply of another; it fears one evil, while it exults in having escaped another; it mourns for a dead friend in the very hour in which it indulges gaiety with the living. The most fortunate have
their

their disagreeable moments: and multitudes are visited with afflictions severe, frequent, and lasting. The soul pants for unmingled joy; but this world affords it not: and can it be reasonable to exceed in fondness for a state in which disappointment is inevitable? Were you permitted to live your past life over again, each of you would wish for an exception of some particulars: and if you should live twenty years longer, you would as little be content to tread again the same unvaried steps. Imagination paints flattering prospects of the future, which inflame the desire of living on: but if they were examined by the standard of the past, they would lose a great part of their power.—Nothing, on account of which you can be anxious to live, is *certain*. You wish to accomplish a favourite design: but you may live, and yet not accomplish it; and you may accomplish it, and find little joy in it. You wish to make provision for your family: but are you certain that, by living, you shall make it? or are you certain that an ampler provision will be a real advantage to them? You wish, before you die, to see your children grown up, and flourishing, and repaying all your cares: alas! the tenderest cares of parents have sometimes been repaid only with anguish: happy would they have thought it, that they had been dead before they

they felt it. Every hope that can enamour you of life, is precarious: can it then justify very earnest wishes to prolong your days? By the unalterable decree of Heaven life is short; the utmost remainder, therefore, of your life cannot deserve great solicitude: and when it has so large a mixture of vanity, need we repine at the decree? Would it really be desirable to have lived before the flood?

THE happiest among mankind will not say, that this representation of the vanity of human life is beyond the truth. Yet it is sufficient to convince us, that an eager desire of spinning out life, would be extravagant in comparison of its value. This representation will not suggest an attempt to extirpate the desire of life: but it will enforce the necessity of moderating it. It will dispose us, neither to be impatient for the hour of our departure, nor to repine because we must soon depart. Content to live as long as God pleases, we shall willingly obey his call to resign our breath. Thankful for life while it continues, we shall feel the approaches of death without dejection. The measure of our days we shall, without carefulness, refer to the will of God.

2. The peculiar attendants of long life may reasonably check the anxious desire of it. Of the

the wish for length of days, which swells into fervour in the breast of the young and the prosperous, it is always tacitly a part, to continue in health, at ease, full of spirits, possessed of a quick relish for enjoyment. This implication renders the wish chimerical. It is not such an old age that is allotted to human creatures. Youth necessarily fades like the flower of the field: years give every thing a very different aspect. Old age is the dregs of a turbid cup. If you live long, you can expect only such a life as falls to the share of man. If that be not highly eligible, you cannot reasonably be anxious for it.

EVEN this darkest period of life is sometimes relieved by streaks of shining light. Now and then you meet an aged person who retains considerable health and vigour, and a capacity for many satisfactions. You see one whose weakness, if it has rendered his enjoyments languid, has likewise rendered his pains gentle. You find one whom a happy temperature has preserved fit for receiving and communicating pleasure in the cheerful intercourse of society. You find one whom the wisdom of religion has rendered singularly instructive, and the benignity of its spirit eminently engaging. You find one who,
looking

looking back, is conscious of a well-spent life; and looking forward, espies a crown of glory prepared for him; who, in the thought that his labours are nearly past, and his reward at hand, tastes more solid and sublime delight, than in all the pleasures of youth; who even rejoices in his infirmities, as the indications of his having reached the gates of immortality. But it is only one from among many aged persons, that falls under any of these descriptions. What may be justly called a *good old age**, is generally good, only in comparison with the old age of other men: compared with the earlier periods of life, its days are almost always *the evil days*†.

I WILL not represent old age in its most frightful forms. I will not paint the condition of that wretch who has wasted his life in empty joys, who cannot longer taste even these, who feels that he shall be *soon cut off and fly away*‡, and who hath not a hope beyond the grave. I will not remind you of the monster who continues to hold fast the sins of his youth; who is racked by desires which indulgence has rendered importunate, but which decay has disqualified him for gratifying; who, sunk into decrepitude, glories in

* Gen. xxv. 8. † Eccl. xii. 1. ‡ Psal. xc. 10.

the former abuses of his strength, and delights in recounting the sins which long ago should have covered him with shame, and produced bitter repentance. I will not describe the man whose avarice grows, as the time in which he can enjoy his riches becomes less. I will not even enlarge on the peevishness, the fretfulness, the suspiciousness, the censoriousness, the severity, which often come on with years; which chace away the young from the society of the aged, and render the attentions of their very children an irksome task. All these are the *vices* of old age: and if you be solicitous to live long, you should be equally solicitous to be virtuous, were it only that, by vice, your latter days may not become in any of these ways contemptible and wretched.

BUT you must expect that your old age will be just like that of most other men, comfortless in many respects. Old age cannot but have fewer enjoyments and more pains than the prime of life. It has rendered the organs callous to the impressions of pleasure; and by frequent repetitions these impressions have become faint. That exertion which was a high gratification in the maturity of life, will be an overpowering burden in its decline. The old have lost their relish for their accus-

tomed pleasures, and there are not other pleasures to supply their place. To every pleasure of the young, the quickness of desire, and the presumption of hope, give a seasoning which the old man cannot procure: he has come to the years when *desire shall fail*, and he *shall say, I have no pleasure in them**. The certainty of his dying soon, throws a gloom upon all his satisfactions. He has outlived the companions of his former days, and he is incapable of forming new connexions with equal closeness. He goes into the streets, into the chief places of concourse, and he finds none that remembers his father; he speaks of the friends of his own youth, and even they are forgotten; he meets but a few who recollect that they have heard their names when themselves were very young. He is left himself *alone, and there is not a second†*: the uneasy thought that he shall very soon be as much forgotten as if he had never been, is every moment forced upon him. *Children's children are the crown of old men‡*: sometimes they rejoice in seeing themselves renewed in a multitude of promising descendants. But it is not always so: sometimes the wickedness or the misfortunes of a family *bring down the grey hairs*

* Eccl. xii. 1, 5.

† Chap. iv. 8,

‡ Prov. xvii. 6.

of the parent *with sorrow to the grave* * : and sometimes his progeny live not to become his posterity : after having followed all his children to the tomb, and spent many of his years in mourning for his friends, he leaves none to mourn for himself ; a stranger closes his eyes, and aliens devour his substance. *Threescore and ten, or fourscore years*, may leave vigour enough to protract existence, but rarely enough to render it comfortable ; *their strength is labour and sorrow* †. If a puny constitution happen to creep forward to age, it then sinks into helpless debility : and the robust, who scarcely knew an ailment for sixty years, derive no other consequence from the remains of their vigour, but greater violence of pain. The disappointments and sufferings of the earlier periods are often relieved by the occupations of active and social life, or alleviated by the expectation of better days : but the old man is capable of no employment which can divert the full sense of his infirmities and distresses ; they cannot cease, they must grow, death is their only possible termination. A fondness for life, retained in old age, is acknowledged to be a desire which has survived its object : it cannot then be reasonable to wish eagerly for long life, which must bring on old

* Gen. xlii. 38.

† Psal. xc. 10.

age. If we reach it, we shall find all the power of patience and pious resignation necessary for rendering it supportable. Its circumstances of peculiar vanity render it really desirable to be *taken away from the evil to come* *.

3. BUT when to the imperfection of the present life, and the multiplied sorrows of long life, we oppose that happiness which is to be obtained after death, who can be so foolish as to form a wish for length of days? Though life contains so much vanity, and the prolongation of it so much increases vanity, that it cannot be worthy of great solicitude; yet, without any hope of another life, the horror of falling into nothing might make us desirous of living on. But we know that we are made for another state, in which God will bestow unspeakable happiness on all who fear and serve him. Can it be but unreasonable to prefer continuing on earth, to an entrance into heaven?

ON earth we are of the kindred of the brutes: but in heaven we shall be *equal unto the angels* †, and like unto God. Many of the enjoyments of this world are trifling;

* Isa. lvii. 1.

† Luke xx. 36.

but

but all the enjoyments of heaven are sublime. Every present enjoyment is incomplete, and leaves some sense of want; but the pleasures of heaven are *fulness of joy**; they satisfy all the capacities of our natures. In this chequered state, sorrows are intermingled with all our joys: but in heaven, *there shall be no more sorrow, nor crying, nor pain*†. All the pleasures of mortality are vitiated by the certainty that they cannot last; a moment of the gayest festivity is often saddened, by imagination representing distemper ready to lay it waste, or death hastening to extinguish it: but in heaven, the delights of every moment, unspeakable in themselves, shall be heightened by the assurance that they will endure for ever, and increase for ever.

HOPE of the blessedness of heaven is the chief joy of the good man; but during this life it can be only hope; and is it reasonable to wish earnestly that, by the prolongation of this life, it may be retarded from ripening into fruition? Is it not desirable that our perfect happiness begin as soon as possible? Can it be wise to shew anxiety for postponing it? Does the exile ever wish that

* Psal. xvi. 11.

† Rev. xxi. 4.

it may be long before he be permitted to return to his native land? Our native land is heaven; on earth, we are but pilgrims and sojourners. Does the fettered prisoner wish that he be not soon released? In these earthly bodies we are prisoners; it is only when we have cast them off, that we *shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of God**. Does the heir of an ample fortune look forward with reluctance or terror to the day which shall put him in full possession of it? And shall we, who are heirs of the heavenly inheritance, wish to defer as long as possible our entrance on it? The strongest instinct would seem too weak to prevent our becoming impatient for the accomplishment of so blessed a hope. But, alas! we are not careful to live in such a manner as may render it certain that heaven will be our portion after death: and therefore we cling to life with all its miseries, through dread of exchanging it for the incomparably greater miseries of eternity. But if we are obnoxious to these, the longest life would be a reprieve too insignificant to deserve a wish. Our only security is in immediate reformation. At present, the thought that you may live to reform, gives you some ease in the sense of

* Rom. viii. 21.

your being unprepared for eternity: but the hour will come when you can live no longer; how dreadful will it be to know that you are unprepared then? It is not the utmost prolongation of life that can prevent it. If you delay your preparation now, you will still delay it: the propensity to procrastination always grows with years. By immediate repentance, by steadfast holiness, *assure your hearts**, that you may be able to moderate your love of this life, by the hope of a better life. Then you will neither murmur at the vanity of life, nor doat upon it as if it were not vanity. Because a due improvement of it qualifies you for heaven, you will, without foolishly overvaluing it, submit cheerfully to whatever it contains. You will look forward to the day of death with patient expectation, yet also with longing desire. Once *confident*, we shall be *willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord†*.

Thus, the nature of the present life, the ordinary attendants of long life, and the happiness of the future life, form together a strong argument for moderating our desire of length of days; for they concur in forcing us

* 1 John iii. 19.

† 2 Cor. v. 8.

to feel that, consider it in what light we will, it is not worthy of vehement desire.

SECONDLY, The desire of long life, when suffered to become immoderate, is *pernicious*, as well as unreasonable: it is a source of pain,—it leads us to delay our preparation for eternity,—and it renders our preparation more difficult.

I. THE desire of life, allowed to become immoderate, is a source of pain and disquiet. Every exorbitant desire creates uneasiness and anxiety; but the exorbitant desire of life, is of all the most tormenting. Life is a complex object, including all the particular goods on which other desires are fixt: the desire of it agitates the soul with violence proportioned to its moment. The disappointment of other desires is but the loss of some one thing: the disappointment of this desire is the loss of our all in the present world. The loss of one enjoyment is alleviated by the hope or the possession of others: but the apprehension of losing life, admits no alleviation; it is the apprehension of being deprived of all sublunary enjoyments at once. All earthly things are precarious; the desires of them must be embittered by frequent fears: but of all things life is the most precarious; every day alarms
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us with examples of its uncertainty; if we indulge excessive fondness for it, we must, *through fear of death, be all our life-time subject to bondage* *. Other desires may be gratified: the desire of life is singular in this, that it cannot possibly be gratified; its object is the future, it is, to live still longer; if we should live a hundred years, at last it must be frustrated. Why should we indulge a desire fitted, so much beyond all others, for involving us in uneasiness, subjecting us to fears, and plunging us into inevitable disappointment? If you have indulged it, yourselves know what disquiet it creates. A thought of the shortness and uncertainty of human life is harassing to you. The death of a contemporary plants a dagger in your heart. A situation of hazard confounds all the powers of your nature, and wrings you with anguish. The slightest ailment, your timidity magnifies into a threatening distemper: you feel the remotest beginnings of sickness with trepidation, lest it should prove mortal. Rid yourselves of these unavailing torments. Conquer your fond solicitude for life. Then shall you fully relish it, while it is continued, without abatement from the dread of dissolution. Then shall you bear the sense of its brevity, without disturbing your sere-

* Heb. ii. 15.

nity. Knowing that you may die to-morrow, you shall nevertheless enjoy this day. Neither wishing for long life, nor reckoning on it, you shall be exempt from the possibility of disappointment. You shall rejoice in every day as a new gift from God: and if your days are multiplied, you shall have the pleasure of living beyond your wish or expectation.

2. THE immoderate desire of life, not only eats out our present comfort, but occasions the delay of that preparation for eternity, on which our future happiness depends. That we may prepare ourselves for eternity, it is necessary that we think of it. But attachment to life, renders the thought of leaving life a torment, and disposes us to banish it as often as it is suggested. We flee to dissipation or to business; we become continually more averse to preparation for our great change. We easily believe what we ardently desire; our fondness for long life begets the expectation of it. We promise ourselves the greatest length of days that man can reach. When we have approached to it, we seem to be persuaded that we shall overleap the utmost limits of the *time appointed to man upon earth**.

* Job vii. 1.

We flatter ourselves that full space remains for the necessary preparation: we therefore still go on to neglect it for the present: death arrests us before we have set about it, and conveys us into the mansions of woe. But by moderating our love of life, we shall be able to bear the thought of dying: many occasions will suggest it, and we shall willingly embrace them. That thought, often present, will instigate us to make immediate preparation. We shall live always, so as to be always fit to die.

3. THE immoderate love of life renders our preparation for death more difficult. Attachment to life, and attachment to the good things of life, mutually support and strengthen one another. Ambition, avarice, sensuality, inflame the love of life; for without our living, they cannot be gratified. They are in their turn inflamed by it. The more anxious we are for life, the higher value we must set upon those things which render it agreeable. But the mortification of fleshly and worldly lusts is a great part of our preparation for death. How can that man be fit to leave this world for ever, who doats upon those things which he must for ever leave along with it? Such lusts are not only vicious, but likewise the great sources of all other vices;

vices; they cherish the habit, they impel to the practice, they impede the relinquishment, of all that wickedness which renders us in every respect unprepared for the state of retribution, incapable of the favour of God, unfit for the enjoyment of him, meet only for the day of vengeance. Like noxious weeds, they cumber the soul, choak the seeds of goodness, and prevent its growth: and they entangle us in pursuits inconsistent with that diligence in well-doing, which alone can form us to virtue, and qualify us for eternal happiness. But if the man who fondly hugs the present life, be called to hazard it in holding fast his integrity, how difficult must he find it to obey the call? Unable to reconcile himself to the thought of resigning this life, he is in the extremest danger of forfeiting all the interests of the next, by a timid apostacy from virtue. It is madness, by fostering an immoderate desire, so much to increase the difficulty of what is in itself difficult enough, the attainment of purity and holiness sufficient to accomplish us for the everlasting presence of the all-perfect God. Where the love of life is moderate, the love of the world can scarcely become extravagant: in proportion as that is conquered, earthly affections will of course decline; our temptations will become fewer and less powerful; our reformation, our improvement,

provement, and our progress will be facilitated and accelerated.

THESE considerations I have suggested, in order to excite you to moderate the desire of prolonging life. I have proved that long life is in many respects undesirable. The vanity of life, the increase of vanity in its later periods, and the excellence of that state from which the protraction of it detains us, at once evince that excessive fondness for it is unreasonable, and impress sentiments fit for checking and correcting it. They are arguments for our setting ourselves to subdue it, and they are the direct means by which it may be subdued.—I have likewise proved that the excessive desire of life produces the most pernicious consequences. These both excite and direct our efforts to subdue it: they not only urge us to restrain it, but at the same time indicate the excesses from which it needs to be restrained. It is not to be extirpated; but it must be rendered consistent with composure and serenity in a full view of the shortness and precariousness of this mortal state; consistent with our willingly dwelling on the consideration of our latter end, and our applying ourselves readily to make preparation for it; and consistent with that disengagement from the things of time, that purity from worldly

worldly lusts, and that constancy in holy practice, which are requisite for our being capable of happiness after death.—I plead not for a stupid indifference to life, a sullen disdain of it, or a peevish impatience for death; to these religion gives no countenance: I plead only for such moderation in the love of it, as suits its real value, as fits the desire of life for answering its end, as prevents the abuse of this passion from defeating, or even reversing, the benefits of which it was intended to be productive; and in strongly inculcating this, reason and religion conspire. But that we may be able to listen to them, we must without delay *fly for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us**; we must, by an effectual reformation, and by unwearied diligence and constant improvement in all goodness, *make our calling and election sure†*. Though an ardent passion for the present life can never be but unreasonable and hurtful, yet it can never become reasonable, and is scarcely possible, for the wicked man to avoid it. Destitute of all good hope beyond the grave, terrified with dismal forebodings of wretchedness, he loves life far beyond his own opinion of its value, he clings to it even while he nauseates it, he pants for it while he knows

* Heb. vi. 18.

† 2 Pet. i. 10.

not how to bear it. In this, as well as in every other respect, wickedness intangles men in palpable absurdity, and ensnares them in acknowledged inconstitence. Speedily therefore abandon wickedness; for till you have abandoned it, all your sentiments and conduct must be contradiction and perplexity; to think or to act rationally, properly, or wisely, will not be in your power.

which will not be in your power, to think or to act rationally, properly, or that man be contradiction and perplexity; abandoned it all your sentiments and con- fore abandon wickedness; for till you have acknowledged inconsistency, Speedily there- in palpable absurdity and connects them in every other respect, wickedness entangles men not how to bear it. In this as well as in

S E R M O N V.

THE NATURE OF SOUND DOCTRINE.

T I T U S ii. 1.

But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.

SOUND doctrine is an expression so commonly used by Christians, that few are apt to suspect any ambiguity in its meaning. Every one of those sects into which the Christian world is unhappily divided, applies the expression to signify the whole of its own system of doctrine, but especially those speculative and disputable tenets which distinguish it from other sects, and even those technical terms which it has coined or adopted on purpose to define them with precision. All sects, with equal confidence, appropriate the epithet to their own peculiar systems: yet the distinguishing tenets of different sects

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are contradictory: It is certain, therefore, that the epithet is misapplied by some of them. Each affirms, that it is misapplied by all except its own adherents: and as the theological system of every sect contains something of human, and consequently fallible, explication, impartiality can scarce avoid suspecting that the epithet is, in some measure, misapplied by all sects. It will not therefore be superfluous, professedly to ascertain and illustrate its genuine import.

WITH this view, I shall, FIRST, examine its precise meaning in Scripture;

SECONDLY, Explain the several particulars which shall, from that examination, appear to be implied in it; and,

THIRDLY, Conclude with some reflexions naturally suggested by the subject.

SOUND doctrine, sound or wholesome words, sound speech, sound in the faith, are all expressions found in Scripture, and evidently intended to convey the same idea. The original words which express the epithet in all these phrases*, refer primarily to bodily health,

* In one text, the adjective *ὑγιής*; in another, the verb *ὑγιαίνει*; in all the rest, the participle *ὑγιαίνων*.

as opposed to disease : but they are, by classical writers, used with great latitude, for signifying metaphorically whatever is right or approveable. They are all words of the same etymology. One of them * primarily signifies *healthful*, but is also used by Greek authors, to signify *healing*, *wholesome*, or conducive to health. Another of them † signifies, most literally, *healing*, but is used likewise, in several places of the new Testament ‡, to signify *healthful*. We may conclude, therefore, that they are designed to be synonymous when they are applied to doctrine, and to denote such as is healthful, or such as is healing, or such as unites both these characters. What they precisely denote, we shall be best able to determine, by comparing the passages in which they occur, and examining the scope and connexion of each. All these passages lie in Paul's epistles to Timothy and to Titus : and, from the slightest attention to them, it will, I think, be evident, that the Apostle calls doctrine *sound*, in a sense very remote from that in which the term is used by the discordant sects of Christians; that he constantly means it to express both the ideas which it naturally signifies; that he intends the genuine doctrine of Christ, but with a par-

* υγιής.

† υγιαίνων.

‡ Luke v. 31. vii. 10. xv. 27.

particular reference, both to its being *healthful*, pure, and unsophisticated, and to its being wholesome or *healing*, as having a practical tendency. So far is he from designing it to denote the peculiarities of any human system, that, on the contrary, he is at pains to intimate, that he designs it to express the plainness and simplicity of the doctrine of the gospel, as delivered by Christ and his Apostles, in direct opposition to the precarious opinions, the subtle explications and definitions, the ingenious speculations and refinements of uninspired men: and so far is he from applying the term to any curious or intricate theory, that he no less clearly and constantly intimates that, by calling doctrine *sound*, he means to express its being fit to cure the diseases, and promote the health, of the soul; and that, in opposition not only to tenets directly immoral, but particularly also to the inutility and pernicious tendency of all subtle questions and abstract disquisitions. These two ideas, by which the Apostle characterizes *sound* doctrine, it will be necessary to trace out jointly; for, in every passage of his writings, they are jointly kept in view with the greatest care.

OUR Apostle uses the term *sound* doctrine, in 1 Tim. i. 10. He immediately subjoins a definition of it: it is what is *according*

to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which, says he, *was committed to my trust* *; it is what is plainly and expressly revealed by God in the gospel. In the context, the idea of *sound doctrine* is still more precisely defined, and fully illustrated, particularly by being contrasted with its opposites. To perceive this, we must look back to the beginning of the paragraph, ver. 3. The Apostle there reminds Timothy, that he had formerly desired him to *charge some that they teach no OTHER doctrine*: OTHER, he can only mean, than the doctrine of the gospel, which he had preached. And what was the other doctrine which they taught? The next words inform us, *Neither give heed to fables, and endless genealogies* †: the fabulous traditions which the Jews had invented, and which, they pretended, led to the right understanding of the Scriptures; and the fanciful notions concerning certain successive derivations of spiritual beings, commonly called *Æons*, from the Supreme Being, or from one another, which the Apostle justly pronounces *endless* or interminable; because, being founded solely in imagination, they might be, and actually were, varied and multiplied according to every man's caprice. The Christian converts from Judaism, retaining their fondness

* Ver. 11.

† Ver. 4.

for both these, endeavoured to intermix them with, or superadd them to, the gospel, under pretence of explaining some of its doctrines with the greater precision and fullness.—

These speculations, which were the human definitions and refinements, at that time heterogeneously interwoven with the gospel, he censures not only as being *another doctrine*, totally foreign to the gospel; but also, very explicitly, on account of their having no *moral tendency*, but necessarily drawing men off from practice; for he subjoins, *which minister questions* intricate, perplexing, unprofitable disputes, *rather than godly edifying*. That it might appear how contradictory they are, in this respect, to the gospel, he asserts that its *end*, its sole purpose, its direct and ultimate scope, is *love out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned**: and so anxious is he to exclude the subtilizing upon its simple principles, that he represents every such attempt as a deviation from its whole structure and design; *from which*, says he, *some*, the teachers already censured, *having swerved, have turned aside unto vain jangling†*. He proceeds to expose the ignorance and self-conceit which led them into this deviation: and, as they vented their fantastical subtleties

* Ver. 5.

† Ver. 6.

as belonging to the law, and under pretence of teaching it perfectly, he takes occasion to explain what was the real design of the law; not to serve as a foundation for such speculative visions, but to condemn every kind of immorality: many kinds of it he enumerates; and it is inclosing the enumeration that he says, *And if there be any other thing that is CONTRARY to sound doctrine* *. Thus directing us to refer the phrase to the whole paragraph, and to explain it by the whole tenour of his discourse; as marking the doctrine of the gospel as *simple*, and as *practical*, fully taught by Christ and his Apostles, and applied to the sole purpose of promoting holiness; uncombined with any refinements of human ingenuity, which always are another doctrine, and never fail to counteract its tendency to produce, not purity and charity, but indeterminable controversies, and unhallowed, uncharitable contentions and divisions.—The idea of Christian doctrine which he had here given, he is solicitous to keep in view throughout the epistle, and frequently recurs to it. In particular, when he predicts a great corruption of the Christian church, and describes it as a *departure from the faith* †, he plainly intimates, that the departure consisted in a deviation from

* Ver. 7,—10.

† Chap. iv. 1.

that simplicity and moral tendency which belong to the true faith; for, in exhorting Timothy to oppose it by *good doctrine**, he gives him this direction, *Refuse profane and old wives fables, and exercise thyself unto godliness*†.

BUT, chap. vi. 3. he speaks again of *wholesome or sound words*; for, in the original, the epithet is the same which he had formerly applied to doctrine. What these were, he immediately explains, *Even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ*, the gospel in the simplicity in which it was at first delivered; and *the doctrine which is according to godliness*: thus studiously unfolding and forcing into view both the ideas which we have affirmed to be implied in the epithet. If farther evidence of this be necessary, the whole context will abundantly supply it. He insinuates, that some *consent not to the wholesome words*, but *teach otherwise*. Otherwise than what? Certainly one of two things. Either, *first*, otherwise than he had taught, and commanded Timothy to *teach and exhort*, immediately before; and then he must mean, that they teach otherwise than they ought, and not according to the *wholesome words of Christ*, who are not careful to inculcate the several moral duties of life; for he

* Ver. 6.

† Ver. 7.

had immediately before been wholly occupied in giving plain practical directions concerning the particular duties incumbent on Timothy himself, on widows, and on servants. Or, *secondly*, otherwise than was required by the general descriptions which the Apostle had formerly given of Christian doctrine: and that these had been anxiously contrived to mark especially both its practical tendency and its simplicity in opposition to all human speculations and opinions, is evident from the passage which we have already explained, and might be confirmed by other passages. The apostle's idea of *sound words* is farther ascertained by the character which he gives of the man who deviates from them*: *He is proud, knowing nothing, but doating, ailing, diseased, about questions and strifes of words.* It is a false conceit of his own acuteness and ingenuity which impels him to subtilize on the plain doctrines of the gospel; and his doing so betrays his total ignorance of their genuine nature, and is truly a distempered appetite for enquiries, discussions, and definitions, which, profound or important as he imagines them, are in fact trifling or unintelligible logomachies, at the best controversies not about truth itself, but about particular modes of expressing it,

* Ver. 4, 5.

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* Ver. 4, 5.

none of them necessary, and perhaps all of them in some respect improper. He stigmatizes these as not only thus foreign to the simplicity of the gospel, but also contradictory to its moral tendency; as speculations *whereof*, instead of *godliness, cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth*. In this passage, therefore, as well as in the former, it is the original, simple doctrine of the gospel, studiously opposed to all abstract, curious definitions and questions misnamed theological, that the Apostle calls *sound* or *wholesome*, and he so calls it with a direct and particular view to mark its natural influence on all the virtues of a good life. It will not perhaps be a blameable minuteness to remark farther, that in this passage it is the words of Christ, not his doctrine as in the former passage, that the Apostle calls *sound*; on purpose, it would seem, to intimate, that the words of Scripture are the most proper for expressing the doctrine of Scripture; that the substitution of other terms, as more explicit and precise, and fitter for distinguishing the truth from error, is really a deviation from the simplicity of the gospel, and a certain means of introducing human refinements, and raising vain and subtle questions heterogeneous to its nature and design. At any rate, the Apostle's anxiety to condemn these

these is plain and undeniable; for returning to this subject, he concludes the epistle with an earnest exhortation to beware of them: *O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called; which some professing, have erred concerning the faith**.

NOTWITHSTANDING all the pains which the Apostle had thus taken to describe and recommend sound doctrine, the false teachers persisted in their attachment to fanciful and unprofitable fables and questions, and disseminated them in the Ephesian, and other Asiatic churches, with so great success, that he found it necessary to resume the subject in his second epistle to Timothy, and to give almost the whole epistle a reference to it. He commands Timothy †, to *hold fast*, to adhere to *the form*, the model and exemplar of *sound words*. It is the same phrase which he had used in the passage last explained, and he uses it in the very same sense. That he means the simple doctrine of the gospel as originally delivered, he is careful to intimate, by immediately subjoining this test and criterion, *which thou hast heard of me*: not the words or the opinions of any uninspired man, but the words and the

* Ver. 20, 21.

† 2 Tim. i. 13.

doctrine of the inspired Apostle. He is very solicitous to inculcate this; for he soon after exhorts him, *The things which thou hast heard of me, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also**; he tells him, *Thou hast fully known MY DOCTRINE*†; he enjoins him, *Continuethou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, knowing OF WHOM thou hast learned them*‡; and he refers him to the Scripture given by inspiration of God, as the only source from which the pure principles of religion can be derived, and declares it to be *profitable for doctrine, and able to make wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus*§.—That it was his purpose, studiously to distinguish this pure, simple doctrine of the gospel from, and to contrast it with, the curious speculations which affected ingenuity might build upon it, the abstract definitions and distinctions by which men might attempt explaining it with precision, the nice and puzzling questions concerning it which they might agitate, and likewise all the unscriptural, technical, and philosophical terms which they might invent or adopt under colour of expressing the exact truth, and effectually excluding the contrary error, is clear

* Chap. ii. 2.

† Chap. iii. 10.

‡ Ver. 14.

§ Ver. 15, 16.

from the whole series of his discourse. When he desires Timothy to put them in remembrance of the things which he had said, he adds, charging them before the Lord, that they strive not about words*, about contending modes of expression. When he directs him rightly to divide the word of truth, he immediately subjoins, but shun, as absolutely inconsistent with this, profane and vain, empty babblings†: he could not have used an expression more significant at once of abhorrence and contempt. Intent on stigmatizing them, he again reprobates them in terms of detestation, But foolish and unlearned questions avoid‡: unlearned in truth they always are, however much they may assume the guise of learning or of penetration.—It is no less evident that the Apostle, in this place calls words sound, with an express design to mark their wholesome or practical tendency: he even labours to force this into view, and to keep it in view. He declares that this is an essential part of his idea of the form of sound words; he carefully includes it in his very description of them; he says, they are the words which are in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus §. Whenever he mentions the refinements and subtleties which he so anxiously

* Chap. ii. 14.

† Ver. 15, 16.

‡ Ver. 23.

§ Chap. i. 13.

excludes

excludes from sound doctrine, he never fails carefully to specify their having no moral, or their having an immoral tendency. They are not only *to no profit*, but to great hurt, *to the subverting of the bearers* *. They are so far from producing love, that they *gender strifes* †. They not only do not promote godliness; but, in proportion as they are indulged, *they will increase unto more ungodliness, and will eat as doth a canker* ‡. In the progress of his discourse, he again predicts that apostasy which he had foretold in his first epistle, and described as a *departure from the faith*; and here he describes it as a contradiction to the *practical* tendency of sound doctrine; he marks it by the corruption of morals consequent on that apostasy, and after enumerating several vices which were to abound in these *perilous times* §, he sums up the character of them, in this, *Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof* ||. Farther, when he recommends the Scripture as the only untainted source of Christian doctrine, he takes particular care to remark, that it is *profitable for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works* ¶.

* Chap. ii. 14. † Ver. 23.

‡ Ver. 16, 17.

§ Chap. iii. 1, —4. || Ver. 5.

¶ Ver. 16, 17.

IMMEDIATELY after this, he gives Timothy a very solemn charge to indefatigable diligence in *preaching* and applying the *word**; in enforcing which he employs the phrase *sound doctrine*; *For the time will come, when they will not endure sound doctrine* †, and he employs it in the very same sense as formerly. He characterizes it by its simplicity, in opposition to all human refinements and determinations: it is *the word* ‡: it is *the truth*, unmixed with any *fables* §, with any of the precarious or false opinions, the doubtful speculations, the disputable niceties, which, he foresaw, would arise in the Christian church, and usurp the name of sound doctrine. He characterizes it by its moral tendency: it is fit to be applied to *reprove* and *rebuke* sin, and *exhort* † to holiness, purposes to which practical doctrine alone is applicable. He characterizes it by both these qualities, in his description of the persons who *will not endure it* §: their aversion to it is owing to *their own lusts*, to a vitiated taste loathing the plain truths of the gospel, peculiar prejudices producing delight in empty subtleties, or corrupt passions disgusting them against the holy doctrine of the gospel, and attaching them to frigid, abstract notions which touch

* Chap. iv. 1, 2. † Ver. 3.

‡ Ver. 2. § Ver. 4.

not the heart, and to loose opinions which give countenance or licence to their favourite vices. Prompted by such lusts, *they heap to themselves teachers*, such as gratify their ill-directed curiosity or their prejudices, by dwelling on the distinctive subtleties of some human system; such as by amusing them with these, divert their attention from good practices; such as propagate principles consistent with an immoral life; *having itching ears*; taking pleasure in hearing only what tickles them, by falling in with their dis-tempered notions or their corrupt inclinations.

IN writing to Titus, as well as to Timothy, the apostle several times applies the epithet *sound* to doctrine, to speech, or to faith; and he applies it invariably in the same sense. Among the necessary qualifications, and the indispensable duties of a Christian bishop, he specifies this, *Holding fast the faithful word, as he hath been taught, that he may be able, by SOUND DOCTRINE, both to exhort and convince the gainsayers* *. This sound doctrine is the simple doctrine of revelation, as proposed in revelation unadulterated with any thing of human invention: he expressly says so; it is

* Tit. i. 9.

the faithful, the sure, the indubitable word, as he hath been taught. It is doctrine of a practical nature; for by it he might *be able to exhort.* That he was desirous of expressing both these characteristics of it, and that particularly in opposition to all unscriptural and unprofitable speculations, is evident from his description * of the *gainsayers* whom Christian teachers were *to convince* BY this sound doctrine; that is, by shewing that their refinements had no foundation in it, not by setting up other human explications in opposition to theirs. They were *vain talkers*, venting frivolous notions under the specious, boasting shew of wisdom and philosophy, of depth or of precision; and by this means *deceivers, teaching things which they ought not*: Their opinions were immoral; they were *unruly*; they *subverted whole houses*; they flattered the corrupt propensities of the Cretans, who had been justly characterized *always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies*. On account of both these depravities of their doctrine, the Apostle commands Titus to *rebuke them sharply*, to expose the futility and immorality of their notions, *that*, says he, *they may be found in the faith* †, that they may return to the simple and prac-

* Ver. 10, 11, 12.

† Ver. 13.

tical doctrine of the gospel, which is the sole object of faith. To keep in view, by what means they had departed from this, he adds, *Not giving heed to Jewish fables*; what these were, we have already seen; *and commandments of men*, definitions, determinations, and impositions of human invention, by which they *turn from the truth**, or pervert it: and by perverting it, by deviating from its simplicity, they deviate likewise from that holiness which is its end; *they profess that they know God*, often that they know him more perfectly, and understand his will more accurately, than others *but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate†*. It is in direct opposition to these false teachers, that the Apostle immediately subjoins in the text, *But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine*: and what he here principally meant by it, he professedly and largely explains in the following verses, *That the aged men be sober*, and so on‡: it is the inculcating of the plain moral duties of life in every condition. When, among the duties of aged men he mentions, *sound in faith§*, and among those of Titus, *sound speech||*, there can be no doubt that he uses the expres-

* Ver. 14.

† Ver. 16.

‡ Chap. ii, 2—10.

§ Ver. 2.

|| Ver. 8.

sion in his ordinary and invariable meaning; and in the latter case he explains it by *gravity*, weight, or importance, and by *uncorruptness**, freedom from all taint of a foreign mixture; and he says, that it *cannot be condemned*; being the simple doctrine of the gospel, not one human explication opposed to another, it cannot be retorted by the adversary, so that he that is of the contrary part, must be ashamed†, confounded and silenced. There cannot be a clearer or a stronger proof, how essential a moral tendency is in the apostle's idea of sound doctrine, or how great a part of sound doctrine he reckons morality to be, than this his professed explication of that idea. It is remarkable, that for nine verses after his exhortation to teach sound doctrine, he does not so much as mention even any of the genuine and simple articles of Christian faith; and when at length he comes to mention some of them, it is not curiously to explain or define them, but solely to represent them as powerful principles of good practice. When he mentions *the grace of God*, its having appeared to men, its bringing salvation, he considers it simply as teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world‡. When he men-

* Ver. 7.

† Ver. 8.

‡ Ver. 11, 12.

tions *the blessed hope, and the appearing of Christ* to judgment, it is only as the *looking for* these will strongly encourage and urge us to those great duties of life*. When he mentions Christ's *giving himself to death for us*, it is only to inculcate its practical end and influence, *that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works*†. In commanding, therefore, to *speak the things which become sound doctrine*, the Apostle most manifestly and explicitly means to command, to inculcate both holiness in general, and all the particular duties of morality, and to be solicitous not to subtilize upon the doctrines of the gospel, or to define them with exact precision, but, neglecting all human definitions of them, to urge them warmly as motives to the several virtues of the Christian life. So anxious is he that Titus and all his successors should teach according to this model, that he adds this charge, *These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke, with all authority*‡. He is so full of the subject, that he returns to it, and after recommending some other moral duties §, and enforcing them by a simple view of the peculiar doctrines of the gospel ||, enjoins Titus, to *affirm constantly, that they*

* Ver. 13.

† Ver. 14.

‡ Ver. 15.

§ Chap. iii, 1, 2. || Ver. 3—7.

which have believed in God, should be careful to maintain good works, but to avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.*

The man who addicts himself to these and propagates them, it is that he calls a *heretic* †, as by restricting and refining upon the simple truths of the gospel, he gives occasion to divisions and parties in the church.

THUS, by an impartial examination of all the texts in which it is mentioned, we have ascertained the true scriptural sense of *sound doctrine*. The Apostle uses the term so often, and whenever he uses it, unfolds and guards its meaning so carefully, that he has enabled us to ascertain it with the fullest and the most convincing evidence. The evidence is indeed so strong, that when we attend to it, so large an investigation may seem to be unnecessary; but men are so enured to an opposite conception of the subject, that the largest investigation will, I am afraid, be insufficient for striking conviction into the rigid adherents to sects and parties, and will be far from rendering it superfluous; as we proposed, in the SECOND place, to illustrate the several particulars which we have found to be implied in it.

* Ver. 8, 9. † Ver. 10.

I. IN general, *sound doctrine* is the pure *genuine doctrine of the gospel*, the very doctrine taught by Christ and his Apostles: entire, without the omission of any part of it: unperverted, without being strained or wrested: sincere, unmixed with any thing else, either in the matter or in the manner of expression: proposed chiefly in the *sound words* in which Christ and his Apostles delivered it. Certainly it can require but little modesty to own that these are the fittest: the words of Christ are the words of God, they were dictated by his divine nature; the spirit of God superintended the Apostles and Prophets, so as to restrain them from using any words which were not significant of the very truth; and, notwithstanding considerable varieties in their style, the language of them all has a certain common character and general complexion; in respect of which we may affirm, that there is one uniform tenour of scriptural phraseology. This general description of sound doctrine will be, in the main, admitted by all sects: for though their peculiar systems be, in some parts, diametrically opposite, each sect reckons its own system the pure doctrine of the gospel: and though they all employ some technical terms not found in Scripture, each reckons its own set of these perfectly equivalent to the terms of Scripture, but more definite,

nite, fit for expressing their real sense so determinately as to guard them against misconception or misinterpretation.

2. IT therefore deserves our most serious attention, That *sound doctrine* means the pure doctrine of the gospel, *particularly as distinguished from all human definitions, limitations, refinements, and superadditions.* We have all along seen how explicitly and how anxiously the Apostle sets it in opposition to all these. His expressions are levelled directly against the corruptions of doctrine which prevailed at that time: but they are so chosen as to be likewise in strict propriety applicable to all posterior corruptions of it; he foresaw these, and foretold them, and has an eye to them, at least in some of the passages which we have examined. Indeed all the curious or forced explications of Christian doctrine, all the groundless or precarious deductions from it, all the subtle controversies about it, which have infested the church, demonstrate themselves to be such adulterations as he condemns; they are marked by the very features which he has delineated; they have produced the very effects which he has described.

THEY had already begun, and they quickly spread wider and wider. Forgetful

that the gospel was not given to exercise ingenuity, or gratify curiosity; and desirous of recommending it to unbelievers, particularly the philosophers; partly too, it must be owned, swayed by their own preconceived notions, and expecting to display the accuracy of their own apprehension, some Christians began very early to conceive the articles of their faith, according to the theories of the Greek philosophy, chiefly the Platonic; to define them with 'scientific precision, and in the phraseology of the schools; and to adopt similitudes for illustrating them, and hypotheses for accounting for them, not only arbitrary, but generally improper. They were accused of error. Their accusers were not wise enough to satisfy themselves with proving, that the Scripture did not imply or admit the sense to which they determined it; but, infected with the spirit of the same philosophy, run into opposite definitions, comparisons, hypotheses, and terms of science, often equally improper, and equally involving error. These were justly retorted upon them by their adversaries. Controversies were agitated concerning these contradictory definitions: multitudes ranged themselves on each side; they broke out into contention, animosities, unjust suspicions, and insinuations, mutual reproaches and invectives. Falsehood was
eagerly

eagerly sought for, and for the most part easily found, in the abstract, subtile definitions of each party. In the progress of disputation, new terms, new distinctions, new comparisons were invented on each side, for marking with precision the peculiarity of its own opinion; and new hypotheses were contrived for reconciling it to Scripture or to itself, and for evading the objections urged against it. Every such attempt produced new questions; and every new question became more frivolous, more notional, more abstruse than the former. In discussing it, new refinements of distinction, and new intricacies of argumentation, were introduced. Every disputant added something according to his own manner of apprehension.

THE church was distracted, bewildered, and inflamed. Councils were assembled to determine the points in question, and to extinguish the heats which they had raised. But instead of *holding fast the form of sound words*, instead of recalling all parties to the simple doctrine of the gospel, and rejecting the unscriptural, precarious explications by which both sides went beyond it; they entered into all the minutiae of the controversy, they debated them with prejudice and passion, they indulged cavil and chicanery, they broke forth
into

into clamour and outrage, into mutual accusations and threatenings, and sometimes they proceeded to tumult and violence. The stronger party overpowered the weaker by their superior vehemence, by the terror of their menaces, by mere force, or by a plurality, it may be, a very small plurality, of voices. They approved all the subtleties, refinements, and inventions of one party; adopted whatever hard words and technical terms they thought fittest for discriminating them from those of the other party; and by a decree of usurped, but formidable authority, they determined all these to be articles of faith, and their chosen terms of art to be the test of the truth. All who refused submission to their impositions, they condemned as adherents to the contrary party, and stigmatized as heretics; and they reviled, anathematized, excommunicated, and, whenever they could get the civil power to enter into their resentments, persecuted, banished, or put them to death. Other councils were assembled, and often gave opposite decisions, established the contrary tenets, and fenced them by contrary terms of art; but still decided in the same spirit of party contention, and violence. None of their decrees ever ended a single controversy. On the contrary, they perpetuated the controversies then subsisting, increased the bitterness of

of contention, and diffused it wider. They never failed likewise to produce new controversies. The persons who opposed them, contrived new terms, distinctions, and cavils, in contradiction to the subtleties implied in their decrees: they differed about these, and split into lesser parties. Those who adhered to the decrees, disagreed about their meaning, broke out into fierce contention, charged each other with error or with blasphemy, and disdained communion with one another. By the rage of controversy, and the spirit of faction in all, the Christian church was divided, and subdivided, and again and again subdivided into sects innumerable, hating and execrating one another; but distinguished only by verbal differences, or by notions of none of which the Scripture affirms any thing, or of which the human faculties can form no clear conception, and of which any conception or thought at all is both unnecessary and unprofitable.

DIFFERENT systems of philosophy were successively in vogue. With each of these in its turn, the doctrine of the gospel was unnaturally incorporated. By this means it assumed a variety of forms, but all of them very unlike to its original simplicity. When the philosophy of Aristotle obtained unrivalled

valled possession of the schools (a philosophy from the beginning subtle, disputatious, and contentious, and rendered more so by the perversion of the scholastics), the Christian doctrine, by being adapted to it, ranged according to its forced mode of distribution, conceived according to its rules of definition and distinction expressed in its hard words, and reasoned about in the artificial manner of its analytics, was totally distorted from its genuine form. A false ingenuity was laboriously employed in devising questions concerning every article of Christian doctrine, in pushing them to the utmost length of subtlety, and wrangling about them with all the nicety of affected precision. Questions sprung from questions in an endless series; all of them unnecessary, most of them of no importance, many of them mere plays of words, many of them ridiculous, many of them interminable, and even unintelligible, nay some of them impious and blasphemous. They were almost all dogmatically determined: the determinations of many of them were erected into articles of faith; and the technical words employed in the determinations, were the only allowed criterion of men's holding these articles.

By such *oppositions* and contentions of *science*, *falsely so called*, continued and increasing through many ages of intellectual darkness, the doctrine of the papal church became a huge body of tenets, unscripturally conceived and expressed, and many of them, not only destitute of all foundation in the gospel, but directly repugnant to it. The Reformers, raised up in a blessed hour for that very purpose, unveiled this mass of corruption, exposed the perversions of the gospel which composed it, and the fables which it had superadded to the gospel. They pronounced the Scripture to be the only rule of faith, and disclaimed all human definitions of its simple principles. Happy had it been if they had persisted steadily in this. But their adversaries demanded, what it was precisely that they believed; they declared an appeal to Scripture insufficient for fixing this, because the authority of its words was pled by all sides; they cried out that the doctrine of Protestants was altogether indefinite and uncertain; they misrepresented it grossly; they called upon them to publish it in determinate language. Overcome by these importunities, clamours, and accusations, and not perfectly cured of the subtilizing spirit from which they sprung, Protestants were led unwarily, though at first reluctantly, to accept the challenge. The earliest explications of
their

their doctrine were tolerably simple; the scholastic mode of arrangement, argument, and expression, was in general rather avoided than affected: but the spirit of abstraction gradually acquired strength and violence; the explications of doctrine given by some displeased others; opposite explications were proposed; questions about them were agitated; they were pushed to greater and greater degrees of subtlety; all the hardest words of the schools were borrowed for expressing the differences of opinion; and all the most frivolous or unintelligible distinctions of the schools were employed in debating them. Protestants were crumbled down into numberless sects, distinguished by peculiarities of belief upon points unnecessary or impossible to be determined. Creeds were opposed to creeds; systems were multiplied against systems; some on all sides, not so much systems of Christian theology, as metaphysical systems of verbal, speculative, abstruse, unimportant controversies, for which a handle was taken from that theology. Each party was tenacious of its own mode of conceiving, and even of expressing the truth; and by this means they have all continued divided and at variance.

SUCH is the general portrait of the departure of the Christians from *the SIMPLICITY of sound doctrine*: every part of it might easily be confirmed

firmed by numberless facts in the history of the church. Not content with thus departing from it, they have substituted the very deviation in its place, and given it its name. Every party appropriates the name of sound doctrine to those peculiar explications, speculations, and definitions which characterize itself, and discriminate it, and set it at the greatest distance from all other parties: but these the Apostle expressly, and in terms of abhorrence, excludes from the idea of sound doctrine, and urges Christians to avoid as repugnant to it. What the several sects have extolled as the soundest doctrine is, therefore, in the Apostle's sense, most unsound. According to his sense of it, the only sense which merits the regard of Christians, the bigot of every denomination, the tenacious partizan of any sect, necessarily deviates in some degree, and generally deviates the farthest.

3. *SOUND doctrine means practical doctrine.* The Apostle studiously and constantly connects this idea with the former; and they are in their nature intimately connected. All abstract definitions of doctrine, all abstruse questions about it, are in their very essence wholly speculative; they are at best fit only for informing the understanding, too often only for perplexing it: their natural effects are thorny disputes, contentions,

tentions, divisions, not the active exertions of Christian virtue and holiness: *Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles**? The utmost they can claim is, that they may be harmlessly amusing: they never can be profitable. If it were possible to determine them with the greatest clearness and certainty, yet they could not influence practice. Abstract ideas are too frigid to warm the heart; too weak to draw out good affections; too dim to be kept in view in the moment of action. They are always in danger of becoming hurtful: the discussion of them excites passions destructive of mutual love; attachment to them diverts men's attention from applying faith to practice; it leads them to lay too little stress on practice, and too much upon opinion. Many questions have even issued in decisions, on one side at least, sometimes on both sides, directly favourable to immorality. Some of the real doctrines of the holy gospel have been so grossly misrepresented in some pretended explications of them, as to be twisted into unholy principles of impurity and vice: and to the real doctrines of the gospel, spurious doctrines have been superadded in some systems professing to be Christian, which by their necessary consequences make void all moral obligation; and

* Mat. vii. 16.

this so plainly, that their partizans find it necessary to disclaim consequences which they cannot refute, and to throw in cautions, caveats, and distinctions, for rendering them, not conducive to, but barely consistent with, good practice, and which will always be forgotten or disregarded in the hour of temptation. Yet, by the most astonishing and the profanest abuse of words, tenets and explications, in their tendency immoral, are, by those who hold them, pronounced the most essential to sound doctrine, the most evangelical, the most honourable to the grace of the gospel: But so far are they from being sound, that they are in the very worst sense *CONTRARY to sound doctrine*; so far from being wholesome, that however fairly they be gilded over, however speciously they be disguised, they are poison.

No opinion can be a Christian doctrine, whose direct and primary tendency is not to holiness. God gave a Revelation of the truth for this very purpose, by it to purify and improve the hearts, and to direct and influence the practice of men. Every part of it is immediately and powerfully conducive to this purpose: all the precepts of the gospel, and all its principles conspire in promoting it. The former prescribe the purest and the sublimest virtue: The latter are even more directly sub-

servient to it, they excite to that virtue. They delineate those qualities, characters, and relations of persons and objects, which are fit for producing right affections, and prompting to right practice towards them: but of those which, though they were known, could contribute nothing to this effect, the Scripture takes no notice. For temper and action, it is not an apprehension of an object scientifically accurate that is necessary, but a conception lively, striking, and interesting: and such a conception the Scripture is careful to give of all the objects belonging to religion. It sets them only in those points of view in which they can enforce piety and goodness; it is intent on setting them in every attitude in which they can most strongly enforce these; and it constantly and earnestly applies them to this end.

THIRDLY, We shall now conclude with some reflexions naturally arising from this subject.

1. It appears that the Christian church is more closely united, in one common faith, in reality than in appearance. In human systems, it is necessary to distinguish the principles of doctrine which they imply from the particular manner in which they explain them. In the latter they differ widely; and it, being derived from

from fallible men, may very readily be improper or erroneous. In the former they very generally agree; and the former only is either of indubitable certainty or of real importance.

2. LET each of us, for himself, study to adhere to, and be satisfied with the pure, simple, practical doctrine of Christ; despising and avoiding all unprofitable questions and speculative niceties, as absolutely foreign to it. It is by no means necessary for us to be wise above what is written: it is improper to attempt it. It is not needful to have any more precise, abstract, or scientific conception of the doctrines of religion, of the mysteries of the Christian faith, than the Scripture gives. If we find that conception inadequate, we may be assured that it is not requisite, perhaps not possible, to render it, in our present state of weakness, more adequate. Whatever words of human invention pretend to mark it with greater precision and force than the words of Scripture, there is always reason to suspect, will either distort, or add something to, the original doctrine of Scripture.

3. LET us carefully attend to the great end of all Christian doctrine, namely, holiness of heart and life, our purification from vice, and our improvement in virtue. Let us constantly repre-

sent it to ourselves as expressly designed and calculated for this purpose. Every opinion of immoral tendency let us abhor as perfectly incompatible with it, and destructive of its very end. Let us learn all the duties of life; let us urge on ourselves all the truths of the gospel as motives to them; let us consider them in those points of view, which can render them the strongest motives. Let us not rest in believing the doctrines of religion; let us study them with the sole design of becoming better; let us be concerned to comply with them, and to act agreeably to them; *let our conversation be as becometh the gospel of Christ* *.

God grant that we *may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God* †: and this *is the will of God, even our sanctification* ‡.

* Phil. i. 27.

† Col. iv. 12.

‡ 1 Thess. iv. 35

S E R M O N VI.

RESIGNATION TO THE WILL OF GOD.

I S A M. iii. 18.

*It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him
good.*

OF the pious affections there are some, which, though always due to God, can be perfectly exercised only in the heavenly state: we must be pure as God is pure, and see him face to face; before we can rise to that perfect love which casteth out fear, or to fullness of rejoicing in the enjoyment of him as our portion. There are others to which our present state gives the fullest scope and the properest exercise: such is resignation to the divine Providence, enabling a man sincerely to think and say, amidst the most disastrous occurrences of human life, *It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good.*

THESE words were spoken by Eli, on an occasion very likely to overcome human fortitude. His sons had been guilty of gross misconduct in executing the priestly office; he had *not restrained them* with sufficient authority; a man of God had, on this account, denounced the destruction of his family*: God had repeated and confirmed the denunciation in a vision to Samuel; *I will perform against Eli, all the things which I have spoken concerning his house*†: Samuel had related to him, all that the Lord had said; and at that instant the power of resignation enabled the too indulgent father to say, *It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good*. In order to explain the temper which is here so strikingly expressed, I shall,

FIRST, Point out the conception of God, from which resignation takes its rise in creatures formed and situate as we are in the present world; and,

SECONDLY, Illustrate the dispositions and exertions by which it is completed.

FIRST, I shall point out the conception of God, from which resignation to his will takes

* 1 Sam. ii. 22—36. † Chap. iii. 11—14.

its rise. Every branch of a pious temper springs from a correspondent conception of the divine character. Resignation springs from a lively sense of God as the sovereign Governor of the world, good, wise, and powerful; who has placed us in a state liable to disappointment and sorrow; and who, by a plan of Providence, too extensive to be fully comprehended by us, conducts us through this life to a higher state of being.

God is the object of our resignation, on account of his perfections; not as considered simply and absolutely, but as exercised in the government of the world, and the disposal of our lot. Were he a being, however excellent, who lived in selfish, solitary blessedness, at a distance from the earth, an inactive spectator of all that passes, unconcerned in what befalls us, we might admire and adore his perfections, but we could exercise no resignation, trust, or confidence towards him. For engaging these regards, a person must have some direction and influence in our affairs. Such direction vested in a fellow-creature, necessarily produces dependence on him: and if we know him to be well-disposed to us, this dependence will be exerted in willing submission and cheerful hope. God

is the supreme Ruler of the universe, the original cause of all events, *the most High, out of whose mouth proceedeth evil and good**. To second causes, no event can be ultimately ascribed; they derive their agency from God; they are but the instruments of his will. Nothing that is not either appointed or permitted by him, can happen to any one of us: *a sparrow shall not fall on the ground without our Father; but the very hairs of our head are all numbered†*. The firm belief of this leads us naturally in every event to take notice of God, and to reflect that it is *the Lord who gave, and the Lord who hath taken away‡*.

WHETHER he give, or whether he take away, his sovereignty exacts our acquiescence. All things are his; he has a right to dispose of them as he pleases. He reigneth with unlimited authority and irresistible power. To withstand his will, to rebel against his appointments, is to usurp his throne, and to prescribe him laws. The attempt is daringly presumptuous; and it is desperately foolish. *We unto him that striveth with his Maker: let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth; but shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? Whatsoever the Lord*

* Lam. iii. 38.

† Mat. x. 29, 30.

‡ Job, i. 21.

§ Isa. xlv. 9.

pleaseth,

pleaseth, that doth he in heaven, and in earth, in the sea, and all deep places*. He giveth not account of any of his matters†. Who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered? Behold he taketh away: who can hinder him? who will say unto him, What dost thou‡? Sensible of his uncontrollable dominion, what can we wisely do, but reconcile our minds to every situation in which he places us, saying, *The will of the Lord be done* §.

His will is always agreeable to his attributes; and these invite us to refer ourselves and all our interests to him. He can appoint only what is fit to be appointed: what is best, always seemeth best to God. His character is goodness, wisdom, and power united. Goodness is the principle of his whole administration: he delights in communicating happiness to his creatures. *All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth* ||. So far as we do not wilfully render ourselves incapable of them, the intentions of his benevolence cannot be disappointed: they are conducted by unerring wisdom. They cannot be defeated: almighty power secures the execution of them. These attributes, in perfect harmony, form a

* Psal. cxxxv. 6. † Job xxxiii. 13. ‡ Chap. ix. 4, 12.

§ Acts xxi. 14. || Psal. xxv. 10.

character fit to encourage our resignation, and allure our confidence. To a fellow-creature, possessed of a very imperfect degree of this character, we often commit very important affairs without scruple or suspicion. To the Creator, who possesses it in perfection, our submission may be unreserved and implicit. *They that know thy name, will put their trust in thee* *. Knowing that such a God presides over the universe, can we doubt that his omnipotent arm will force the most dissimilar events to co-operate for the best and wisest purposes? Under his government, what evil can his sincere, though frail, creatures reasonably dread? When *he careth for you*, can you hesitate to *cast all your care upon him* †? Is he not, O my soul, thy refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble ‡? *How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings* §. Our experience of the past gives support and energy to our conviction of the divine character: gratitude for the multitude of mercies which Providence has bestowed on each of us, naturally checks complaint on account of what is disagreeable: and recollection of the many instances in

* Psal. ix. 10.

† 1 Pet. v. 7.

‡ Psal. xli. 1.

§ Psal. xxxvi. 7.

which

which the most threatening events have turned out signally to our advantage, enforces tranquillity with respect to the present, and reliance with respect to the future.

SOME creatures are so entirely assimilated to God, so extensively acquainted with the ways of his Providence, and so unalterably fixt in perfect happiness, that their acquiescence in the will of the Ruler of the universe, is not so properly resignation, as gratitude and joy. To give scope for resignation, some imperfection of nature, or some defect in state, is requisite; and both these conspire to give it exercise in human creatures.—Our nature is so complicated, our senses and desires are so various, and often so incompatible, that we cannot, by any means, obtain all possible gratifications at once. To secure one, we must submit to the want of another: to enjoy pleasure, we must forego profit; to accumulate riches, we must forfeit ease; to the attainment of temporal goods, we must often sacrifice the satisfactions of virtue and integrity; and not to lose these, we must resign many gratifications of sense, appetite, and passion. By forming our nature in this manner, God proclaims that we are not made for unallayed happiness; lays us under a necessity of bearing disappointment, and giving up many things

things which would be desireable; requires us to be content with that measure of enjoyment, however incomplete, of which he has made us capable, and which he is pleased at any time to grant us; and prepares us for eagerly embracing the excellencies of his character and government, as giving ground for our referring ourselves to him without repining.

OUR state in this world affords full place for resignation, and demands the exercise of it. We must be satisfied to want particular advantages which even inferior animals possess: the strength of the lion, the swiftness of the horse, the flight of the eagle, belong not to the condition of our being, and are for ever without our reach. The advantages proper to our condition, are not at all times attainable; and those which we have attained, are not always permanent. We are not placed in a region of continual serenity; we dwell in the land of storms and tempests. Our state is mixt, complicated, and precarious. Because our bodies are subjected to the laws of the material world, and connected with it by manifold relations, our souls are necessarily affected by its vicissitudes. Pain and suffering are inseparable from human life. Prosperity and adversity unexpectedly succeed each other
by

by quick intervals. In the morning we *know not what the day may bring forth* * ; and we have neither strength nor wisdom to mould its events according to our wishes. Our condition depends not wholly on our own behaviour ; God, in token of his sovereignty, and for the purposes of his government, has in a great measure reserved to himself the disposal of our enjoyment and suffering ; and frequently dispenses them in a manner which appears to us unequal or promiscuous, and of which we can give no account. We feel ourselves ignorant and impotent, unfit for our own direction, unable to accomplish our desires. While we have no dependence but on ourselves, we are orphans exposed in a strange land, we are travellers solitary and benighted, in a waste and dreary wilderness, left to wander in a thousand undistinguishable by-paths, surrounded with dangers, uncertain but the next step may lead us to destruction. We are ready to faint under the uneasinesses and apprehensions which press upon us. We cannot but wish for the friendly guidance of superior wisdom and superior power. We cannot but learn with pleasure, that there is a God all-good, all-wise, and all-powerful, who governs the world, in whom we may

* Prov. xxvii. 1.

confide,

confide, into whose hands we may resign all our interests with unreserved trust. We naturally repose ourselves on him who carries on one fixt and well-contrived plan amidst all the changes and commotions of things, who *sitteth upon the flood**, who *walketh upon the wings of the wind*†, who dwelleth in the tempest, who from darkness produceth light, and from confusion bringeth forth order. A firm belief and an habitual sense of his wise and gracious, though incomprehensible, administration, is our only adequate support.

By the appointment of God, our present life is only a part of our existence, an introduction to a future life, subordinate to eternity. In consequence of this appointment, nothing in our present state is final; nothing to be regarded only on its own account: every thing has a reference to eternity, and thence derives its real importance. Prosperity and adversity, pleasure and pain, success and disappointment, are but different means of promoting the same end, but different methods of training us up for immortality. It is in this light that God always considers our present life, and the several events which fill it up. Steady in his plan, unmoved either by weak pity or by

* Psal. xxix. 10.

† Psal. civ. 3.

weaker fury, he goes forward in the execution of it, through all the methods of severity and gentleness, of chastisement and reward, of restraint and encouragement, allotting us such events as tend most, if we duly improve them, to promote our everlasting welfare. In this light we likewise ought constantly to view our earthly state. The view will strengthen the principles of resignation, and assist its exercise. We are but travellers through this world; whatever affects only our outward condition, whatever is merely temporal, must be of little moment; it is no more than the accommodation of an hour at an inn, which we are soon to leave: it is too inconsiderable to disturb our equanimity, or check our submission to the will of God. Our prospect is enlarged to eternity; we look down upon this world as from the height of heaven: and as the little hills, in the eye of him who stands on the top of a lofty mountain, sink to a level with the plain; this earth seems but a point, and all those earthly things which formerly looked big, and excited the most anxious wishes or the most pungent regret, dwindle into insignificance. We are raised above some of those clouds which obscure the throne of God, and give an appearance of confusion to the ways of his Providence: what was irregular and inexplicable when referred only to time,

time, becomes beautiful and consistent by being connected with eternity. When we consider this life as but one period of our being, one stage of our progress to perfection, the most disagreeable events are often discovered to be the most useful, as tending most directly to the improvement of our hearts, and thus are rendered the objects of the most rational submission and the most cheerful resignation.

THE connexion of this life with eternity, opens likewise a new field for the exercise of our resignation and pious confidence. Unable to direct our own course amidst present things, which are seen, we cannot but be more unable to direct it to the future world, where all is unseen. We have need of the guidance of him who ruleth both worlds; and to his guidance, a sense of our situation will make us solicitous to commit ourselves. Nature feels the want; but the notices which nature gives of the future world, are too imperfect to support confidence in God for its felicity. It is the gospel only that can support it. It teaches us that God hath set on foot a stupendous dispensation of grace and love for bringing the children of men to immortal glory. That sins repented of might not produce distrust, he has given his Son for our redemption

redemption from all these sins, and to be *the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him**. Informed of this dispensation, we can, with joyful confidence, resign our eternal state, in well-doing, to the disposal of God our Saviour. It was on purpose to render our *faith and hope* in him firm and assured, that he has *redeemed us by the precious blood of Christ, and raised him up from the dead, and given him glory†*. He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things‡?

SUCH are the sentiments of God's character, of the nature of his Providence, and of his conduct and intentions with respect to ourselves, from which resignation to his will takes its rise. Resignation requires some knowledge of the ways of God, for supporting and encouraging it; but it likewise supposes some degree of ignorance and uncertainty, leaving room for implicit submission and dependence. What we know of God, of the general measures of his government, particularly over mankind, invite our acquiescence in his disposals: in many cases too, he has given us express promises, for the accomplishment of which his fidelity is engaged, by which we may safely regulate our expectations, and

* Heb. v. 9.

† 1 Pet. i. 21-22.

‡ Rom. viii. 32.

sustain our hopes, resting, so far as they extend, in full assurance of the very things promised. Amidst the absolute uncertainty of the particular events which shall befall us, *we know that all things work together for good, to them that love God* *; and all our hopes for eternity he has directed by the most explicit promises, and by a clear determination of the conditions on which we may become partakers in them. But we are totally ignorant of the particular steps of God's present providence, of the nature of those events which await us, and of *what is good for man in this life* †; and we are ignorant of many things in the nature of our future state, and that dispensation by which the everlasting happiness of the obedient is secured. The whole system of Divine Providence is too large and too intricate, to be fully comprehended by our weak understandings; the greatest part of it is covered with thick darkness, and impenetrable to mortal eyes: *no man can find out the work which God worketh, from the beginning to the end* ‡. We can only have recourse to that great Being who comprehends and orders all things, to whom *all his works are known from the beginning of the world* §; following implicitly wherever he leads us, resigning ourselves to his disposal, through all the unknown

* Rom. viii. 28. † Ecclef. vi. 12. ‡ Chap. iii. 1. § Acts xv. 18.

paths by which we must travel forward to the more unknown regions of eternity.

To explain the dispositions and exertions by which a temper of resignation is completed, was the **SECOND** thing proposed.—It consists not in a cold speculative belief that the good and wise Providence of God orders all that concerns us, but in the consent of the heart that it should be so. It presupposes love to God, which is indeed the common foundation of all the virtues of piety, and an essential ingredient in every devout affection; for we can never refer ourselves to the disposal of a person whom we reckon not deserving of our love; but it includes something additional to love, regarding the divine goodness, wisdom, and omnipotence, as employed in the government of the world and the management of all our interests, it appropriates these perfections to ourselves, and begets a sense of security in yielding ourselves up to God's disposal. It includes hope in God, which renders it not the forced sufferance of slaves, but the willing submission of subjects. But the hope is mingled with fear; the sovereignty of God impresses us with awe; the extent of his plan of government involves us in uncertainty, what kind of events he may perceive to be best for us; we feel present sorrows, and have reason to believe, that the ge-

neral good and our own greatest happiness will require our bearing many things which are disagreeable, and our enduring severe chastisements for our iniquities. A sense of this prevents our indulging the expectation of every thing that would be pleasing to us, and in its place substitutes a general confidence, that what impairs our satisfaction, will notwithstanding contribute to our happiness.—Resignation requires us to receive both good and evil from God : but it requires us not to receive them with the very same sentiments. It supposes that we are sensible of pain, that we feel it with aversion, and look forward to it with apprehension : it consists in our nevertheless encountering and sustaining it with quietness, and submission to Him who has ordained it. It allows us to sorrow, but not to fret : it allows us to fear, but not to despair : it allows us to desire, but not with impatience. It leads us to yield to those events which we cannot avoid, without any rebellious motions of heart. It is a pliability of soul, by which our temper suits itself to all the vicissitudes of our state. It brings our will and our desires to give place to the pleasure of God, as soon as we discover what it is. It teaches us to check our inclinations whenever they are inconsistent with his appointments ; and to controul them steadily, till they concur with his good

good and perfect will, and suffer us to rest satisfied with all that he decrees, as the best for us.—That we may the more distinctly perceive the operation of a temper of resignation, let us consider it as exercised with respect to the present,—the past,—and the future.

I. RESIGNATION must be exercised with respect to the present. Whatever our condition at any time is, we must submit to it contentedly, patiently, and with dutiful acquiescence in the will of God. Resignation supposes not that all things should become indifferent to us: this would be to divest us of the senses and affections which are essential to human nature. It requires us not to be insensible either of the defects or the distresses of our lot: it requires us only to bear them. It is not to be measured by the acuteness of our feelings: the tempers of men are necessarily very different. Some have a natural coldness or hardness of constitution, which admits but a slight impression from circumstances of uneasiness: but if their composure proceed not from a religious sense of the Divine Providence, it is not resignation; it is only a stupid unfeelingness of soul, or a sullen stubbornness of disposition. Others are of a soft and delicate make, easily and deeply affected with whatever befalls them: but if they, notwith-

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standing,

standing, preserve an unrepining reverence of Providence, the sensibility of their hearts is so far from being inconsistent with resignation, that it much enhances it: they devoutly chuse that God's good pleasure be accomplished, though it gives them so great pain. The best of men have expressed their sense of their distresses very pathetically, even while they exercised the most blameless and exemplary resignation. Job welcomed the loss of all his substance and all his children with the cheerfullest submission, because it was the Lord who had taken them away: yet he rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and said, *Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither**: but in all this, we are assured, Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly †. I was dumb, says David, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it ‡: this was the meekest resignation; but it prevented not his having a pungent sense of the reproach of the foolish, the stroke of God, and the blow of his hand by which he was consumed §. Even he who is greater than man, and who was perfect in resignation, saying, *Nevertheless, not what I will, but what thou wilt*, felt all the bitterness of his situation, and was

* Job, i. 20, 21.

† Ver. 22.

‡ Psal. xxxix. 9.

§ Ver. 8, 10.

fore amazed, and very heavy, and said, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death.* Resignation operates, not by extinguishing the sense of evil, but by restraining it within proper bounds.

ANY present dissatisfaction or uneasiness is apt to engross all our thoughts, and to absorb our whole attention. We often yield to the impression of it, without any effort to relieve or to resist it. We abandon ourselves to grief, and sink into dejection. The spirit of resignation suggests such sentiments as can divert or alleviate the sensation of distress. It renders us recollected, and when that sensation cannot be suppressed, draws out the vigour of our souls on purpose to sustain it.—Instead of endeavouring to restrain or mitigate the sensations of uneasiness, we too often wilfully inflame them. We suffer imagination to search out all the circumstances that can aggravate them, and we incessantly ruminate upon them. By the multitude of our thoughts, we are loaded with supernumerary evils, our souls are broken into peevishness, and irritated into discontent. Resignation checks the wanderings of imagination; it turns it to such views as can divert our grief: we think how much worse our situation might have been, and how much worse the full punishment of

* Mark xiv. 33, 34. 36.

our sins would render it; and we become pleased that it is so tolerable: we consider the good ends to which it may be improved, and embrace it as the means of confirming us in those virtues to which it gives scope and opportunity. — By our yielding to the impressions of pain or disappointment, they are enabled to destroy our relish for all enjoyment. It is the business of resignation to establish such composure and serenity of mind, as may leave us open to all the satisfactions which our condition can afford. Sensible of one evil, and groaning under it, we forget not our remaining comforts, we suffer not ourselves to undervalue them, we rejoice that they too are not withdrawn.

The irreligious attend not to the hand of God in what befalls them: or if they acknowledge it, it is only to censure the ordinations of his Providence, to complain of the severity of his dispensations, to murmur and repine, to set their mouth against the heavens, and even, it may be, to blaspheme the perfections of the divine nature. The pious man, on the contrary, ascribes all that befalls him to the benevolent and wise appointment of God; and even when he cannot help lamenting his own condition, he suffers not himself to think hardly, or to complain of Providence. He inculcates

inculcates on himself, that what God wills must be better for him than what he wills himself, though at present he perceives not how: being sent by that gracious God who *doth not afflict willingly**, it must be sent for his own and for the general good. We every day submit, not only with patience, but of choice, to what is disagreeable in itself, when we know it to be useful; we endure the bitterness of medicine for the sake of health, we cheerfully undergo fatigue for the sake of gain. A full conviction of the wisdom and benevolence of Providence, may justly be as effectual for composing our souls into resignation, as the prospect of any determinate advantage. Under the power of that conviction, we acquiesce in poverty or distress, as, in unknown ways, by its concomitants or its consequences certainly subservient to our present or our future good. In adversity, forget not how many mercies you have constantly derived from the bounty of God, retain a sense of them, continue to be thankful for them: your gratitude for them will nourish resignation for the contrary evils. *Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil†?* In afflicting you, he only recalls what was always his own free gift: the

* Lam. iii. 33.

† Job, ii. 10.

health which you now find broken, the riches which you have lost, the beloved child or the dear friend for whose death you mourn, were only lent to you by the Lord of all things for a while; you owe him thanks for having lent them so long, and should restore them with cheerfulness whenever he demands them: *the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord**. He who giveth liberally and delighteth in beneficence, we are sure, would not take away but for the best reasons. His mercies and his chastisements are links of the same chain of wise arrangements for our good. *Why then art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God†.*

AN unresigned temper breaks in upon the affection which we owe to men, as well as upon the regard which we owe to God. It fixes our view on those persons who have contributed to our disappointments or our calamities; and it kindles wrath, rancour, and revenge against them. It excites these passions against such as have been only the innocent occasions of our losses or our suffer-

* Chap. i. 21.

† Psal. xliii. 5.

ings. It directs our attention to those who are in more fortunate circumstances than ourselves; and it tortures us with envy. It produces a settled dissatisfaction, which breaks out in ill-humour, peevishness, and abuse towards all who are connected with us. Resignation, on the contrary, by establishing continual serenity of soul, prepares the heart for exercising benevolence in every situation. Under the heaviest pressure of distress, it leads us to treat our companions, our friends, our families, our dependants, with a placid sweetness, and mild though perhaps melancholy complacence. It permits not a wish for bettering our own state, by robbing any man of his prosperity. It distinguishes between the innocent occasions, and the guilty causes of our troubles; and even towards the latter, it represses the emotions of malevolence: repentance and forgiveness are all that it prays may overtake them. It considers all second causes as only instruments employed by the Supreme Ruler; and by respect to him, it softens all our sentiments of them. It enabled David to overlook the inveteracy of Shimei, and to say, *Let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him: it may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day**.

* 2 Sam. xvi. 11, 12.

THE continuance of adversity is apt to depress men's spirits, or to produce impatience. They weary themselves with vain wishes that their condition were other than it is or can be; and in all their wishes they interpose not, if it be the will of the Lord. Struggling against his appointment, they attempt to extricate themselves by unlawful means; or fainting under his correction, they become incapable of using any means for their deliverance, sit down in sullen indolence, and sink into despondence. Resignation condemns not the wish for deliverance from evil; but it prevents its swelling into anxiety, and it keeps it in subordinacy to God's good pleasure. It converts all the wishes of the heart into devout supplications, and directs them to heaven in fervent prayers to God most high. It is so far from being inconsistent with innocent endeavours to remove what occasions us disquiet, that it qualifies us for employing them to the best advantage. The inward serenity which it establishes, enables us quickly to discern, what steps we have it in our power to take; and the tranquillity and firmness of mind which it produces, prepares us for pursuing them with prudence, vigour, and perseverance. Composed and recollected in ourselves, we can always perceive and execute what our situation requires. At the same time, resignation teaches

teaches us to reject with abhorrence every sinful method of extricating ourselves, however effectual it may seem to be. *Fret not thyself in any wise to do evil** : as long as without doing evil you cannot better your condition, it is the will of God that it be not bettered ; and it is your duty to reconcile yourselves to it as it is, to *trust in the Lord, and do good, to rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him†*. When all present circumstances are the most unpromising, when immediate deliverance appears impossible, yet we despair not of deliverance ; we know that God can nevertheless send it by the most unlikely and unexpected means, and we indulge the confidence that he will send it if it be truly good for us, and send it at the fittest season. But if he should never send it, we repine not, we yield not to dejection ; it will be as God pleases, and that is always the best, and must demand our contented submission. If every worldly enjoyment be taken from us, we still repose ourselves in the wisdom and goodness of God's inscrutable designs, saying with David, *I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me : refuge failed me ; no man cared for my soul : but thou,*

* Psal. xxxvii. 8.

† Ver. 3. 7.

O Lord,

O Lord, art my refuge, and my portion in the land of the living.*

2. OUR resignation must extend its influence backward to the past. To discontent on account of our present situation, the restlessness of imagination often superadds an uneasy and repining recollection of events which happened long ago. There is reason for our reproaching ourselves with such events, when they were owing to our own misconduct; yet even in this case repentance for that misconduct is sufficient, and perpetual regret for the inconveniences which it once occasioned, is wrong. *Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins †?* But when disagreeable events arose not from our own fault, no natural principle can lead us to allow the remembrance of them to eat out our present satisfaction. It should rather heighten the relish of succeeding ease and prosperity. To be continually thinking, how much better our situation might have been at times than it actually was; to retain resentment against the authors of our past misfortunes; to remain implacable against Providence for permitting them; to cherish the fretful remembrance of them, and the re-

* Psal. cxlii. 4, 5.

† Lam. iii. 39.

mains of that discontent which their presence produced; to become, by these means, habitually sullen and dissatisfied with a world in which we have not been always so prosperous as we wished; is perversely to enter into a conspiracy against our own enjoyment.

THE pressure of a present evil may plead some excuse for frail man, if he murmur under it: but when the evil itself is past, to retain the ill temper which it produced, is inexcusable. Deliverance from calamity is the subject, not of murmuring, but of thankfulness. If it has left some consequences which affect your present state, yet we ought by degrees to reconcile ourselves to them. The first assault of trouble may surprize us into peevishness; but when we have had leisure to bethink ourselves, and to ponder it deliberately, it is but reasonable to expect we should call up our resolution, collect our courage, invigorate our souls to bear it, apply ourselves to the peculiar duties for which it gives opportunity, and form ourselves to that cheerful enjoyment of life, which becomes those who live in a world regulated by infinite perfection. By the treachery and malice of his brethren, Joseph had undergone all the hardships of long slavery and imprisonment: but they left neither resentment nor repining.

repining. When these brethren afterwards stood before him, pierced with remorse, and overwhelmed with terror, instead of so much as upbraiding them in the gentlest terms, he with equal generosity and piety turned up the fairest side of their conduct and his past condition: *Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life: God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth: so now it was not you that sent me hither, but God*.*

3. RESIGNATION exerts itself in trust and reliance upon God for the future part of our existence. Formed reasonable creatures, capable of foreseeing the consequences of our own actions, and the effects likely to result from other causes, we cannot be wholly unconcerned about the future. We guess what it will be, and regard it either with hope or with fear. It is this wise and gracious constitution of our nature that fits us for regulating our conduct by the prospect of what may be, for being affected with good or evil before they become present, and for using our endeavours to obtain the one and avoid the other. But many convert it into a source of disquiet and

* Gen. xlv. 5, 7, 8.

vexation:

vexation: by the abuse of it, solicitude and impatience, about future events, creates them far greater unhappiness than the sense of present evils. They are ever prying into those designs of Providence which are unsearchable to human sagacity, and miserable, because they find themselves unable to discover them. They wish for some good thing; and grieve themselves because they cannot obtain it: they hope to obtain another; but repine that it is not already obtained. They distress themselves with terrors which will never be realized: the very possibility of trouble or disappointment fills them with apprehensions: if it become probable, they are overpowered with dread, and either wait its approach with despondence, or essay to prevent it by doing what is wrong: and if it become imminent, *trouble and anguish make them afraid, and prevail against them as a king ready to the battle* *. Strangers to resignation, we must be restless in forming schemes for the future, fearful of their failing, and a prey to painful and unavailing cares.

It belongs to God to determine what events shall fill up our lives: our part is, to submit to them whatever they be, to

* Job, xv. 24.

prepare ourselves for bearing them, and to exert ourselves in improving them. Sensible of our own ignorance concerning what would be best for us, we should refer all our concerns to the direction of Him who is infinitely wiser than we, and more concerned for our true happiness than ourselves can be.— Unable to conjecture what may be before us, we should rejoice that it is only what God wills, saying with David, *I trusted in thee, O Lord; I said, Thou art my God, my times are in thy hand* *. In respect of all events without exception or reserve, we should exercise such implicit confidence as Abraham showed, when, at the call of God, he *by faith* left his native land, and *went out, not knowing whither he went* †. The language of our souls ought always to be, Lead me, O God, whither thou wilt, I willingly follow thee: send what is truly good for me, though I should be averse from receiving it: withhold what would be hurtful, though I should most earnestly desire it. It is not in the power of man to frustrate the ordinations of Providence: the severest of them every mortal must endure, however bitterly he repine, and however violently he struggle against them: by reconciling our souls to them, we only

* Psal. xxxi. 14, 15.

† Heb. xi. 8.

prefer the decrees of unerring wisdom to the suggestions of our own folly, and escape the agonies which frowardness superadds to the intrinsic weight of our distresses.

I MEAN not that resignation forbids our wishing for an easy and comfortable state, in preference to a lot of sorrow and calamity. The wish is natural and inevitable. But we should indulge it only in subordination to God's good pleasure. We should not suffer it either to settle too peremptorily on a particular object, which, for what we know, he may see meet to refuse, or to swell into anxiety and carefulness. We should check every propensity to suppose any one of the uncertain enjoyments of this world essential to our happiness. If God ordain what is most contrary to our wishes, it is our duty to keep ourselves in readiness, to meet it without sullenness, and without violent perturbation.

RESIGNATION must not be confounded with improvident thoughtlessness about futurity. It permits the most attentive forecast; but it renders it calm and composed. It permits us to employ all our prudence and activity in executing every innocent design; but it teaches us, having employed them, to refer the event to Him who rules the world, avoiding painful solicitude

folicitude about success or disappointment. Using the fittest means in our power for accomplishing our purposes, our dependence should be on God for rendering them effectual, and our prayers for success should be with the reservation of its being his will. *I would seek unto God, and to God would I commit my cause* *. If he frustrate my endeavours, I will not peevishly complain of cross accidents, but cheerfully acquiesce in it as the doing of him who permits only what is best and fittest. Assiduous in all the duties which suit the condition allotted to me by him, I will rest satisfied that, whether my desires be gratified or disappointed, it shall be well with me; and assure myself that he will bestow upon me, though not perhaps what I would chuse, yet what it is proper for perfect goodness and wisdom to bestow. *For the Lord will not cast off for ever; but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies* †.

RESIGNATION exerts itself in dependence upon God, for all the interests of the future, as well as of the present life. Looking forward to the God of his salvation; believing in the Son of God, and relying on his media-

* Job, v. 2.

† Lament. iii. 31, 32.

tion, who *is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him**; yielding himself to the influence of the Holy Spirit to *fulfil in him all the good pleasure of God's goodness, and the work of faith with power †*, and exerting himself strenuously by his assistance in doing the will of his heavenly Father; the good man cherishes, through life, the blessed hope of immortal happiness. Conscious of his integrity, he is confident that, for the sake of Christ, God will pardon all his imperfections. Careful to perform the terms of the gospel, he expects, without tormenting doubts, the promised reward. He shrinks not, trembling, from the darkness and solitude of the grave; he trusts that God will be his companion and his guide amidst its unexplored gloom: when his breath is going out, *he commits the keeping of his soul to God in well-doing, as unto his faithful Creator ‡*: and transported into the world of spirits, he finds that his dependence was not in vain, that the issue surpasses his fondest expectations; resignation is lost in love, hope yields to fruition, trust is converted into fulness of joy.

SUCH submission in respect of the present, such unrepining recollection of the past, and

* Heb. vii. 25.

† 2 Thess. i. 11.

‡ 1 Pet. iv. 19.

such dependence for the future, are the genuine exertions of that temper of resignation, which is justly due to God, as the good, the wise, and the almighty Governour of the universe, the sole Disposer of our lot. That essential principle in our constitution, which makes us easy in the want of what belongs not to our state, but to other ranks of creatures, piety cherishes into dutiful resignation to the ordination of our Maker, in things which may belong to the state of men, but which he sees fit to deny to us. The lot of every man is fixt within its own limits, and cannot be altered by our solicitude; it is folly not to comply with it: it is fixt within these limits by infinite perfection; we may embrace it cheerfully. *It is good that a man should both hope, and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord**. Resignation is a temper singularly requisite and useful in the present state.— Were it cultivated and exercised with sufficient care, it would render our wills coincident in all things with the will of God, make all our desires to terminate, and our souls to rest, in his appointment, and enable us to proceed composedly through all the vicissitudes of this world, to the full enjoyment of Him in the next. It dislodges many vices

* Lam. iii. 26.

from the heart: it excludes the stubbornness of self-will, the effeminacy of voluptuousness, the rapacity of covetousness, the eagerness of false ambition, the violence of grief, the fierceness of anger, the dejections of fear, the exorbitance of desire, the grumblings of envy, and the clamorousness of complaint. It implies many of the most important virtues of the Christian life: exercised in submission to the defects and imperfections of our lot, it establishes contentment; in bearing its distresses, patience; and in encountering its dangers, fortitude. It is interwoven with pious trust; and it shoots out into religious joy. To a superficial eye, resignation seems to be altogether passive: but it issues in the most active virtue. By moulding our whole souls into an entire conformity to our condition, it enables us to occupy, with propriety, the sphere assigned to us, to act cheerfully the part befitting it, and in the most unpleasant situations to apply with alacrity and vigour to whatever duties they demand. Drawing us off from solicitude about events, it directs our principal attention to the defeat of the temptations, and the improvement of the opportunities, resulting from our condition; that by this conduct we may be warranted to indulge hope of the divine protection.

WOULD you acquire, or carry to greater perfection, the spirit of resignation, you must bestow your first pains on the root from which it grows: you must form a just conception of the benignity and wisdom of God's almighty providence, and by close and frequent meditation fix that conception in your minds, and render it lively, familiar, and ever present to your thoughts. Resignation cannot thrive in a soil choaked up by earthly passions: we must prepare our hearts for the reception of it, by self-government and self-denial: immoderate desires are necessarily insatiable; abundance cannot satisfy them, it only enlarges them; importunate desires operate with a violence and turbulence inconsistent with the tranquillity of resignation; both render us incapable of submission and deference to him who with-holds their gratification. Every temper is rendered habitual, by congruous exercise. Endeavour to exercise resignation in bearing the several events of life; accustom yourselves to exert it both in trivial and important matters; be not unguardedly ruffled by inconsiderable crosses; suffer not the greatest disappointments to overwhelm your spirit with excessive or permanent vexation; when at one time you have failed in maintaining your composure, labour to maintain it more perfectly on the next occasion. Exercise your resignation likewise in devotion;

votion: retreat frequently from the world to your God: under a lively sense of his intimate presence with you, give scope to your sentiments of dependence and confidence in addressing him; explicitly *commit your way unto the Lord**, and refer all your concerns to his disposal; implore his protection, and his assistance for resting in the assurance of it. *Trust in him at all times, ye people, and pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us†. Wait on the Lord; be of good courage: and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord‡.*

* Psal. xxxvii. 5.
xxxi. 24.

† Psal. lxii. 8.

‡ Psal. xxvii. 14.

S E R M O N VII.

SUBJECTION TO THE AUTHORITY OF GOD.

P S A L M cxix. 4.

Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.

THE will of God may be considered in two lights, as regarding either the events which befall us, or the conduct which is prescribed to us. Viewed in the former light, it is the object of resignation; viewed in the latter, of subjection and obedience. Resignation arises from a sense of God's right to dispose of us, and of the wisdom and goodness of all his dispositions: subjection arises from a sense of his right to command us, aided by a conviction of the equity and benevolence of all his laws. The one is a willing submission to God's natural government of the world: the other a willing submission to

his moral government. United, they complete that loyalty of heart which we owe to the Sovereign of the universe. It is the latter that my text leads us to consider. In this address, *Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently*; or, as it is translated by some, *Thou hast commanded thy precepts that they may be diligently kept*; David acknowledges that God publishes his laws with an authority which demands our obedience, and expresses his own disposition to yield obedience. A sense of duty towards God, a subjection of heart to his statutes, is indispensibly incumbent on us as the subjects of his government, and is the immediate principle of compliance with the dictates of his will. For illustrating this important part of piety, let us consider,

FIRST, That authority by which all his laws exact our obedience; and,

SECONDLY, That subjection of heart which is due to the authority of these laws.

FIRST, Let us consider the nature of God's authority over us, or of his right to prescribe us laws which we are obliged to observe.

IN

IN order to perceive it, we must attend to the constitution of our moral nature, we must reflect on the operation of our own conscience. From it, our very idea of authority is primarily derived. Conscience is our supreme power: it claims a right to govern all our passions and actions; and it forces us to feel that it has a right to govern them. By it we are *a law unto ourselves* *. In its very exertion, we, without reasoning or study, perceive the authority of its dictates, and our obligation to regulate all our motions according to them.—What it approves, we are immediately sensible is right, and ought to be done; what it disapproves is wrong, and ought not to be done. It does not merely propose our duty; it enjoins it: it does not merely discern good from evil; it commands, and it forbids.—When our heart tells us that we have violated its commands, we condemn ourselves, we are stung with remorse, conscious of ill desert, and apprehensive of misery: but when we reflect on our having fulfilled them, we become possessed of self-complacence, inward joy, the feeling of good desert, and the hope of happiness. Such is our original idea of authority: the very acting of conscience involves a sense of the authority of its own decrees, and, cor-

* Rom. ii. 14.

respondent to this, of our obligation to comply with them.

It is conscience, likewise, that makes us capable of perceiving, and teaches us to acknowledge, authority in one person over another. It enables us to distinguish a lawful superior from a tyrant or usurper; it recognizes in the former, a right to command us, which belongs not to the latter. One of our fellow-men may become our lawful superior: and whenever he does, conscience requires us to obey him, and enforces our obedience to him, by the very same sentiments and exertions, as our submission to its own decrees. The counsels of a friend are, to our feeling, essentially different from the orders of a superior. A master, a father, a ruler, a sovereign, have a just authority, to which we *must be subject for conscience sake* *. But when we turn our thoughts to God, and consider his perfections, and the relations in which he stands to us, conscience acknowledges an higher authority and a more sacred obligation. All the characters which can imply a right to command us, are united in him, and belong to him, in an infinitely higher sense than to any other being.

* Rom. xiii. 5.

OUR parents are not the proper causes of our existence: they are only the instruments by means of whom we receive it. Yet from this they derive an authority over us, which all men own to be just, and feel to be sacred. Disregard to it, is necessarily and universally accounted, not only base, but unnatural. God is the First Cause, who made our parents the instruments of bringing us into life: he is the proper Author of our being and our whole nature. His authority is, therefore, greater and more absolute: to oppose it, is baser and more unnatural. *Shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of our spirits, than to the fathers of our flesh*? Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: therefore ought I to learn and to keep all thy commandments †. Because thou art my Creator, I am indispensibly bound to remember ‡ thee, and to devote myself to thy will. Thou who gavest me all my powers, hast an unlimited right to direct the application of them: to employ them in any action which thou forbiddest, would be to employ them against him whose they wholly are.*

A MASTER has a right to the labour and obedience of a servant, while he sustains him;

* Heb. xii. 9.

† Psal. cxix. 73.

‡ Eccles. xii. 1.

and

and a prince to the allegiance of his subjects, while he protects them. The Lord is our Master in heaven*; the Lord is our Lawgiver; the Lord is our King†. He has a perfect right to our service and allegiance: he supports our very being; he gives energy to all our powers. If he withdrew his preserving hand for a single moment, they would all be blasted, and we must fall into nothing. To resist his authority, to transgress his laws, is to affect independence upon him, on whom we are totally dependent: it is to oppose him with those faculties which we retain, and can exercise, only by his permission.

A FELLOW-CREATURE who has the justest authority over us, may give commands which are of no obligation: they may be unlawful and wrong. But the authority of God is absolute in all things; the obligation of his laws admits of no exception. His is perfect rectitude of nature; he can will nothing that is wrong: Wherefore his law is holy, and his commandment holy, just, and good‡. The law of the Lord is perfect; the testimony of the Lord is sure; the statutes of the Lord are right; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether§. In acting con-

* Eph. vi. 9.

† Isa. xxxiii. 22.

‡ Rom. vii. 12.

§ Psal. xix. 7, 8, 9.

trary to such laws, there must always be pollution and depravity: but while we observe them, we must continue pure and unblameable; *they do iniquity who walk in his ways* *.

THE benevolence of God's nature gives additional authority to his laws. Men may issue their orders without regard to the interest of those from whom they require obedience, or even with a view to hurt them. But perfect goodness can enact no laws in the moral world, but such as are intended for the most extensive happiness of the rational creation. They are designed to point out and enforce that course by which moral agents may promote the general good, and their own true interest. By violating the laws of God, we do what we can to bring misery on ourselves and others. By making them the invariable rule of our temper and our conduct, we contribute our part to the perfection and order of the universe, and we pursue our own felicity. *The Lord hath commanded us to do all these statutes for our good always* †. They can have no other aim. They are the dictates of pure benevolence. *More to be desired are they than gold, yea than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey, and the honey-comb* ‡.

* Psal. cxix.

† Deut. vi. 24.

‡ Psal. xix. 10.

WITH the best intention possible, men may prescribe us rules which shall prove of very pernicious consequence. They are fallible, and may mistake their tendency. But God's wisdom is unerring: he knows all the tendencies of his laws. They must be fit for swerving the purpose of benevolence. Obedience to them cannot but produce happiness. — The certainty that they will not mislead us, adds confidence to our conviction that we ought to be guided by them. In them, the *uncreated wisdom uttereth her voice, and crieth, I will make known my words unto you: receive my instruction, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold: my fruit is better than gold, yea than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver: I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of righteousness* *.

RECTITUDE, benevolence, and wisdom, united in a superior degree, give a man an authority and influence among his fellows, to which they of their own accord pay a deference, though he has not power to enforce it. This is the truest authority. Mere power, by creating dependence, may compel submission: but the submission is always reluctant and unwilling. On the contrary, that which we yield

* Prov. i. 20, 23. viii. 10, 19, 20.

to the directions of superior worth and wisdom, is spontaneous and hearty. Our heartiest and our most cheerful submission is therefore due to God. All his precepts are the dictates of infinite perfection; the counsels of goodness and wisdom in conjunction, for regulating our whole conduct: can we imagine ourselves at liberty not to regard them? They are a transcript of his own excellence: and can they be but binding upon all those creatures whom he has formed capable of becoming partakers of his excellence? Every precept of God has an inherent authority, implied in its excellence, its necessity, and its utility: an injunction from the All-perfect carries along with it an immediate obligation upon us to obey it.

BUT strong and commanding as this immediate and internal obligation is, our obedience is not left to rest on it alone. Every perfect law contains a sanction, as well as a precept. All the precepts of God's law are enforced by sanctions. Punishment is denounced against the transgressors, and reward is promised to the observers of them. The strength of the obligation thence resulting is confessed by all: the force of sanctions exacts obedience from those who would pay little regard to the righteousness of the precept. Human laws

generally owe their influence almost wholly to their sanctions; their authority is slighted, when these are not strictly and vigorously executed: and by impotence, or injustice in the execution, the best laws are rendered totally ineffectual. With the divine law it never can be so. The venerable authority of its precepts is awfully supported by its sanctions. They are the most important and interesting; and it is certain that they will be executed. They can neither be wrested by injustice, nor defeated through impotence.—The divine Law-giver is *a God of truth, and without iniquity; just and right is he**. His perfect justice binds him to maintain the authority, and vindicate the honour of his laws. With incorruptible and undeviating righteousness, he will inflict punishment on the disobedient, and bestow reward on the obedient. In his administration there can be no partiality. When the proper time is come, when this state of trial is ended, he *will render to every man according to his deeds; and there will be no respect of persons with God†*.—Whatever sentence his justice pronounces, his power will execute. Power is the great support of the authority of laws, among those who are disaffected to them; it urges respect to them, by rendering it our in-

* Deut. xxxii. 4.

† Rom. ii. 6. 11.

terest and our only safety. How tremendous is the authority of God's laws! how inviolable their obligation! It is defended by omnipotence. *I am the almighty God; walk before me* *. The one Lawgiver is able to save, and to destroy † — In the transgression of his laws there can be no security. Justice, armed with omnipotence, on purpose to enforce them, precludes the slightest hope of impunity. Will ye, by disobedience, provoke the Lord? Are ye stronger than he ‡? or can ye by a gift pervert his judgment? Misery shall be the portion of a wicked man from God §. Though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished ||. Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the way of the Lord: blessed are they that keep his testimonies ¶. In keeping of them there is great reward **.

So manifold are the foundations of God's authority over us. On every possible principle, he has a right to govern us by his laws. His authority is supreme; to it all other must give way: it is sovereign over all the actions of the most exalted creatures, and is by them acknowledged to be sovereign; his angels do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word; and the hosts of heaven are his mi-

* Gen. xvii. 1.

† Jam. iv. 12.

‡ 1 Cor. x. 22.

§ Job, xx. 29.

|| Prov. xi. 21.

¶ Psal. cxix.

** Psal. xix. 11.

*nisters, that do his pleasure** : how then can the children of men plead an exemption from obedience? His authority is absolute, circumscribed by no limitation : to render any thing incumbent on us, it is only necessary that it be required by God ; to convince us that it is incumbent and to make us guilty in neglecting it, it is sufficient that we know it to be required by him. Whether it be suggested by nature, or intimated by revelation, whether it be enjoined by the dictates of conscience, or imposed by a written precept, we are bound to it by the whole strength of the divine authority.

REASON qualifies us for reflecting on the constitution of our nature, and teaches us that it is the workmanship of God ; that he made conscience a part of it, that he gave it the authority which we feel it has to govern us, and therefore that it is the will of our Maker that we should be governed by it. It is he who hath, by its notices, *shewed thee, O man, what is good*, and assured thee that *the Lord doth require it of thee* †. Thy conscience is, and causes thee perceive that it is, the deputy of the most High. It bears his commission ; and it speaks in his name. It affirms

* Psal. ciii. 20, 21.

† Mic. vi. 8.

and it proves itself to be the guide of life, which he has appointed thee to follow. It impresses an instantaneous and irresistible conviction, that all its dictates are his *laws written in thy heart* *. It enacts them as his laws, and it proclaims their sanctions. While it punishes the violation of them with immediate remorse, it denounces farther punishment from the hand of God; it forces on thee a perception of demerit towards him, and guiltiness in his sight; and it fills thee with apprehension of the misery threatened in that perception. While it approves the observance of them, and rewards it with gladness of heart, it likewise promises a higher reward; it declares it worthy of God's approbation; and inspires the hope of happiness from his favour.

THE clearer and fuller publication of his statutes, in his word, is attended with the same authority. All the holy men who by inspiration promulgated his moral laws, inculcated them upon the consciences of men by, *Thus saith the Lord*; declared him the Almighty Vindicator of them, and fortified them by promises and threatenings from his mouth. Convinced that they spoke by commission from

* Rom. ii. 15.

him, we are bound to receive all their words as the words of God. The perfect revelation of his will in the gospel of Christ, is stamped with the highest authority of heaven, and entitled to our most dutiful and reverent submission by many circumstances of affecting peculiarity. It has the authority of God explicitly interposed for it, when by a voice from heaven he testified, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*, HEAR YE HIM *. It has likewise the authority of the only begotten Son of God: to *magnify the law, and make it honourable* †, he sent a divine messenger to promulgate it. He said, *They will reverence my Son* ‡. His dignity bespeaks its infinite importance, and recommends it to our most careful and conscientious observance. In publishing the will of God, Christ spoke, not only as the messenger, and as the Son of God, but also as the Saviour of mankind; who has recovered us to the ability of obeying it, and restored us to a capacity of obtaining, through him, the reward of obedience; who, by dying for us, has purchased our service to God. By him God demands our obedience on a new title, superadded to all the other rights of his sovereign dominion. He demands it as God

* Mat. xvii. 5.

† Isa. xlii. 21.

‡ Mat. xxi. 37.

our Saviour *. He requires us to *serve him in holiness and righteousness*, because he has *delivered us out of the hands of our enemies* †. He requires us to *glorify him in our body and in our spirit*, because he hath *bought us with a price* ‡. By exacting the death of Christ for our redemption, he has made an awful declaration of the sacred obligation of his laws. In the gospel, obedience to them is secured by the great sanctions of eternal life and eternal death, clearly revealed, strikingly described, and not only confirmed by the most express promises and threatenings, but also sealed by the blood of Christ.

WHAT now is implied in that subjection of heart, which the authority of God's laws demands from us? To explain this, was the *second* thing proposed: and in explaining it, we will be best directed by attention to the same constitution of human nature, which has led us to a just conception of the divine authority.—Our nature consists of two parts, conscience, enjoining what God requires us to do, and appetites and passions, either opposing or complying with what it enjoins. For our being in subjection to the laws of our Creator, it is necessary both that conscience enjoin with

* 1 Tim. i. 1.

† Luke, i. 74, 75.

‡ 1 Cor. vi. 20.
force,

force, and that appetite and passion obey with readiness. A temper of subjection, therefore, implies two things,—that a sense of duty towards God, or a regard to his will, be the ruling principle of our conduct,—and that all our other principles of action submit to be regulated by it.

I. A REGARD to the will of God, must be our ruling principle of conduct. The very definition of authority, is a right to govern us; the very idea of a law, is a declaration of the will of a superior, obligatory upon us. Conscience, which is the original law of God to us, and the immediate percipient of the obligation of all his laws, differs essentially from our other active powers. It does not merely incline or impel us: it prescribes authoritatively, and pronounces it unlawful and wrong not to listen to it. Each of the others is intended to influence us only on some occasions, in such of our actions as it is particularly adapted to: but conscience is intended to influence us at all times, it is alike adapted to all our actions. To govern them all is its right; and it is our leading principle, whenever it has power to maintain this right.—God gave us his law, to be our rule in all cases and at all times without exception.

A GENUINE regard to its authority, will first of all render us solicitous to know, what it is that God requires of us. To have no concern so much as to know our duty, is inconsistent with the faintest desire to do it; it betrays the grossest indifference about it; it is pouring the utmost contempt upon the authority by which it is required. To listen to him when he speaks, is the very lowest mark of deference that we can pay to a superior; an equal would with reason be offended, if even from him we should with-hold it. Supine or wilful ignorance of the will of God proclaimed in his moral laws, marks many among mankind for *children of disobedience**. They bestow no attention on their obligations. Like brute beasts, they heedlessly follow the present inclination, without reflecting whether it be right or wrong. They are at no pains to consult their conscience how they ought to act; and when it spontaneously interposes and obtrudes its admonitions on them, instead of hearkening to it, that they may learn God's law from its mouth, they labour to silence it, that it may not testify against their sins, nor interrupt the course of their transgressions. They are at no pains to study the precepts of God's word: if ever they cast an eye upon

* Eph. ii. 2.

them.

them, it is not that they may understand their real import, and apply them honestly to their direction in the ways of virtue, but that they may explain them away, and reconcile them to their sins. In such men, conscience can have no power: it is so far from being the supreme principle, that it cannot be properly one principle of their conduct. Their own will, their inclination ever varying and tossing them about at random, not at all the will of God, gives the colour to their whole behaviour. To have no sense of good and evil, is the consummation of depravity; and the sense of them can be only in proportion to our knowledge of them. In the knowledge of our duty, the foundation of a temper of obedience must be laid. Wherever knowledge fails, practice must fail of course. A prevailing regard to the sacredness of obligation, will not suffer us to be willingly ignorant of any particular of its demands.—That it may prove a principle of real virtue, we must likewise be careful to avoid every misapprehension of our duty. The delusive mists of prejudice and passion often obscure the light of the divine laws, set before us a false form of virtue, and pervert the sentiments of conscience. An erroneous conscience gives its sanction to vice, and enforces the wrong as right. It may impose upon us as the will of God, what is most repugnant to his

his

his will: it may lead us into heinous sin, in the full persuasion that we do *God service* *. — An uninformed conscience can be no guide; and a misinformed conscience must be a false guide. Ignorance of our duty subverts the power of conscience: mistakes about it render that power dangerous; the more strenuously it exerts its authority the more intent we are on fulfilling its dictates, it will the more certainly mislead us, and the more irresistibly drive us into sin. — To dispel our ignorance, and correct our errors, God has given us the revelation of his will. Its divine authority binds us to study it with the greatest diligence; and to study it with a single and honest intention to learn what God really requires of us; to *consider his testimonies* †, and *meditate in his precepts*, that we may *have respect unto his ways* ‡. Even the plain precepts of God's law may be misunderstood or misapplied; they have sometimes been wrested to authorize the blackest crimes. It might have been prevented by attention to the native sentiments of the human heart: to the corrupt propensities of man, the pure law of God must be contradictory; but it will always approve itself to conscience, and fall in with our best affections. If it be repugnant to these, it is doubtless misinterpreted.

* John xvi. 2.

† Psal. cxix. 95.

‡ Ver. 25.

The suggestions of our moral nature, and the maxims of Scripture, mutually illustrate one another, and must be studied in conjunction. A conscience enlightened by the full understanding of God's written law, will be an unerring guide.

THAT a regard to the will of God may be the governing principle in our hearts, we must not only clearly understand its dictates, but feelingly perceive their obligation. To be qualified for holding us in subjection to its authority, conscience having ascertained our duty justly, must impress a lively and ardent sense of it. A callous conscience is insensible; its perceptions are dull; its warnings against transgression, and its reproofs for our having transgressed, are faint and feeble; it can be touched only with heinous guilt. The calls to action come suddenly upon us: if conscience be asleep, they are past before it can bestir itself to offer its advice; we have violated our duty, before it was in condition to remind us of it. Exempt from seasonable admonition, serious remonstrance, and quick remorse, men can have no effectual restraint from going on in disobedience. But where conscience reigns, it is constantly awake, ready to perceive our duty in the moment of action, and alert in suggesting it. *The senses are exercised to discern both*

both good and evil *: and they rest not in cold discernment. They have a delicacy of feeling, which perceives every sin with keen disgust, and every virtue with eager complacence: goodness is embraced with warm affection; evil is rejected with hatred and abhorrence. The sensibility of conscience renders its dictates striking, fit to affect the heart, and to actuate the conduct. Its decisions are revered, because they are pronounced with vivacity, and impressed with earnestness. Keeping a watchful and piercing eye upon our conduct, it is quick and active in *accusing or else excusing* us †; it is soon aware of every deviation from our duty; the smallest sin is recollected with regret; a heinous transgression breaks the spirit into contrition; the slightest hint is sufficient to rouse the heart to remorse for our having sinned against the Lord. The authority of conscience is confirmed, and a respect to all the divine commandments enforced, by the experience that every act of disobedience is followed by pungent sorrow, and that only the strictest adherence to our duty can secure our peace of mind. The encomium given to Josiah, is, that *his heart was tender*: the sense of the encomium is obvious in his history: reflecting on the former iniquities of his kingdom, he

* Heb. v. 14.

† Rom. ii. 15.

*bumbled himself, and wept before the Lord**; and he made a covenant before the Lord, to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul†; and he declined neither to the right hand nor to the left‡. It is the very character which I have now described.

CONSCIENCE is both a power of perception, and a principle of action. Its influence as a principle, will always be in proportion to the clearness and the strength of its perceptions. If it apprehends our duty darkly and uncertainly, it must impose it with hesitation; if it feels obligation faintly, it can inculcate it but feebly: but when it is accurately informed, it dictates with assurance; when its sensations are affecting, it commands with energy. It is its vigour, as a principle of action, that gives effect to its perceptions, that secures the application of them to the actual direction of our conduct, and impresses us with a prevailing regard to the will of God. Entitled by the original constitution of our nature, and the appointment of him who formed it, to rule within us, its right is notwithstanding often violated, and its authority despised, because it

* 2 Kings xxii. 19. 2 Chron. xxxiv. 27.

† 2 Kings xxiii. 3. 2 Chron. xxxiv. 31.

‡ Ver. 2.

has lost its power. We see what is right, and yet do what is wrong. We hear its commands, and we counteract them. Its throne is usurped by passion. We are in a temper of disobedience to God. That his laws may govern us, conscience must be reinstated in its just supremacy. Its power must be commensurate with its authority. It must be able to enforce whatever it pronounces to be right. All who are not perfectly abandoned pay some regard to conscience: they allow it some influence in its turn with their appetites and passions; they act from it in some instances; they do some things because they are right, and forbear others because they are wrong. But this is not enough. Like the Almighty, whose deputy it is, it ought to have absolute and uncontrouled dominion. It should make itself to be obeyed in every case, and in opposition to the claims of every appetite and passion. Our concern should be, not what is pleasant, or what is profitable, but solely what is right and good. Once informed of what God really requires, we must hold it indispensable. There remains no room for a moment's suspense, whether we will comply with it or not. The language of duty is, *All that the Lord hath said, will we do, and be obedient* *. A

* Exod. xxiv. 7.

darling passion craves indulgence, an inclination rises to the action by which it might be gratified: but conscience intimates that God forbids it; our *heart standeth in awe of his word**, and we *refrain our feet from every evil way, that we may keep his word†*. The corruption of our nature struggles against the exertion of a good affection; we are indisposed to a good action; conscience reminds us that God requires it; we *esteem all his precepts concerning all things to be right‡*; and we rouse ourselves to fulfil them. Conscience, in full possession of its natural dominion, forces on us an habitual attention to its directions; it preserves them so intimately present to our view, and entwists them so entirely with all our thoughts, that they readily occur, and determine our choice in the hour of action. In every situation, we take time to ask ourselves, What is the duty belonging to it, what the part which God wills us now to act? *His testimonies are our counsellors ||*. *His word have we hid in our heart that we might not sin against him §*. By our bringing all our intentions before it, taking its judgment concerning all our motions, and uniformly complying with its dictates, it is daily invigorated. Every transgression weakens its power; every act of obedience confirms and

* Psal. cxix. 161.
|| Ver. 24.

† Ver. 101.
§ Ver. 11.

‡ Ver. 128.

extends its influence. By the habit of submitting implicitly to its decisions, its sway becomes more and more sovereign and irresistible, till it *bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ* *.

2. THAT our hearts may become subject to the law of God, it is necessary, not only that conscience be invigorated, and enabled to enforce our duty powerfully, but likewise that all our other principles of action be formed to submission to it, and regulated in all their exertions according to its dictates. Conscience is not the whole of human nature : along with that supreme faculty, we have many appetites, passions, and affections, which attach us to a variety of objects, and impel us to a variety of actions. Whenever their objects are presented, they necessarily rise, and instinctively urge us to those actions by which they may be obtained. If the only practicable means of obtaining them, in any case, be disallowed by conscience, and condemned by the law of God, they will, in proportion to their strength, instigate us to violate conscience and deviate from our duty. The scripture, therefore, represents our nature as consisting of two opposite principles, *the flesh* and *the spirit*, contending for the

* 2 Cor. x. 5.

dominion of the heart. *The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other **. The law of God cannot but often lay a restraint upon our inclinations: and for this reason the scripture acknowledges it to be a yoke, and requires us to *take it upon us †*.

OUR natural passions, enured to no controul, strengthened by continual indulgence, and sustained by the corruption of our hearts, are too refractory to be governed by a sense of duty. They rise with assurance, and with an irresistible force drive us on to gratify them. Conscience pronounces it unlawful; but in vain: it attempts to restrain them; but it is opposed and defeated. Its power is broken, and its authority renounced. The heart is froward and perverse; *revolting and rebellious ‡*; the life is a course of disobedience and transgression against the laws of heaven. *They that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh ||*. They fulfil the desires of the flesh §. They are disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate **. They are the servants of sin, not the servants of God; they yield their members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, not as instruments of righteousness unto holiness. While sin reigns within them, it must have dominion

• Gal. v. 17.
|| Rom. viii. 5.

† Mat. xi. 29.
§ Eph. ii. 3.

‡ Jer. v. 23.
** Tit. i. 16.

over them, and force them to obey it in the lusts thereof*. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God, because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be †. The strongest sense of duty cannot determine us effectually, except our sensual appetites, our corrupt passions, and our worldly affections be likewise weakened. While these preserve their strength, they will maintain a continual opposition to it; they will prevail alternately, and distract the soul. It is like a war carried on between parties of equal power; the success of either can never be decisive. A conscience acting with vigour, and passions operating with undiminished force, produce, by their incessant struggles, that harassing state of mind which the apostle describes: *that which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. To will, is present with me; but how to perform that which is good, I find not; for the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. I find a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me: for I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body*

* Rom. vi. 12—20.

† Chap. viii. 7, 8.

of death †! The power of conscience, conjoined with ungovernable passions, can only fill us with unsufferable anguish in the sense of our continual disobedience. To render it productive either of obedience or tranquillity, all those passions and principles of action which oppose our obligations must be weakened and subdued. We must *keep under our body, and bring it into subjection* ||. We must *through the spirit mortify the deeds of the body* §. For enabling us to mortify them, the spirit of God is given; and all the strength which he infuses into our hearts, we must employ in checking and in conquering every propensity to sin. Our passions cannot be extirpated; nor can their impulses be brought perfectly to coincide with the dictates of conscience. In this earthly state they always meet their objects; they are excited by the view of them; they aim at indulgence; and they retain some power. In the best some corruption remains; the seeds of disobedience are not wholly destroyed; there arises now and then a wish for a forbidden gratification; they *cannot* always *do the things that they would* †; they fall at times into acts of sin. But vicious passions are generally restrained; by being restrained they become weaker and weaker; they are enured to submit to the li-

† Rom. vii. 15—24.
§ Rom. viii. 13.

|| 1 Cor. ix. 27.
† Gal. v. 17.

mitations of duty; and accustomed to cease from importunity, whenever their demands are perceived to be forbidden. In proportion as they are brought to yield to the controul of obligation, we become *willing and obedient* *, and our *hearts inclined to God's testimonies* †.

ALL the affections of our souls are by no means equally contradictory to conscience, or alike apt to seduce us from our duty. The benevolent affections rather fall in with conscience, and instigate us to fulfil its dictates. They are the immediate principles of that conduct towards other men, which conscience approves, and God requires: and the same affections directed to God, and raised and refined by the infinity of his perfection, are the first rudiments of piety and devotion. When human nature is distinguished into the *spirit* and the *flesh*, these affections are referred to the former: the virtues into which they grow up by proper culture, make a great part of *the fruits of the spirit* enumerated by the apostle, *love, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness*: their opposites, *hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, envyings*, as well as the natural effects of the sensual and the selfish passions, are reckoned among *the works of the flesh* ‡, and can become no other. In our de-

* Isa. i. 19. † Psal. cxix. 36. ‡ Gal. v. 19-23.

praved state, even our best affections need to be kept under the dominion of the ruling principle. If they were indulged without any reserve, they would degenerate into vice; if their impulse were implicitly followed in every case, it would lead us astray from what is right. They must be restrained from improper exertions, and regulated by the divine law. But still they stand most in need of being cherished and strengthened. The prevalence of vicious passions cumbers the soul; like noxious weeds, they choak the seeds of good affections, prevent their growth, and repress their exercise. When the heart is cleared from the former, the latter take root, and flourish, and bear their precious fruits. Nourished by the dews of heaven, purified by the influences of grace, and preserved from irregularity and distortion, they are the native principles of those virtues which God commands us to cultivate, and of those good actions which he enjoins us to be diligent in performing. Their vigour gives support to conscience; they are engaged on its side. They tend directly to the extinction of many of the vices which it most severely condemns; they stand in diametrical opposition to every species of malevolence; they are incompatible with the *filthiness of the spirit* *; they restrain us from *fulfilling the evil*

* 2 Cor. vii. 1.

*desires of the mind**; they co-operate with the sense of duty in subduing the power of corruption. They are the ministers which carry the commands of conscience into execution: they are the *members* which we are called to *yield*, and which alone are fit to be yielded, *as instruments of righteousness unto God* †. To the entire subjection of our hearts to God, the strength of good affections is no less necessary, than the mortification of vicious passions. We must be *alive unto God*, as well as *dead unto sin* ‡. His law requires both abstinence from evil, and diligence in well-doing: the controul of corrupt inclinations only render us capable of the former; it is the strength and energy of good affections that can qualify us for the latter. If they were weak and languid, it would render us unfit for that active holiness which is pleasing to God; a necessary impulse to our duty would be wanting; we would be indisposed to it, and often neglect it, notwithstanding the strongest perception of its obligation. Our obedience would be only the outward service of the body; the heart would not be engaged in it. The fervour of good affections is the living spirit, which must animate it.

It is when the heart is in this manner formed to obedience, by the mortification of

* Eph. ii. 3.

† Rom. vi. 13.

‡ Ver. 11.

vicious

vicious passions and the improvement of good affections, that a sense of duty, and a regard to God's law, will become in fact our ruling principle. It will actuate us in the practice of all the virtues; but it cannot be, in the very same sense, the principle of them all. It is obviously deducible from what has been said, that they are of two kinds. Some virtues are negative; they consist in the restraint of such passions as tend to vice, and issue in abstinence from the gratification of them. Temperance, justice, and moderation of desire, imply no positive disposition impelling to them; they consist wholly in repressing the impetuosity, and avoiding the excesses, of sensual appetites and worldly passions. Conscience disapproves the indulgence of these, and condemns it as prohibited by God; from respect to its judgment, we set ourselves to subdue them: that respect is the proper and only principle of our abstinence: and this abstinence has no value, in a religious and moral view, but so far as it proceeds from that respect. Other virtues are positive in their nature; they consist in the strength and prevalence of pious or kind affections; they issue in performance. These affections, and all the genuine exertions of them, are good in themselves; and, on account of their inherent goodness, are approved and enjoined by conscience.

These

These are the proper and immediate springs of the practice which is congruous to them; and give it value, though we should not reflect on its being our duty. If it were not the expression of these affections, but proceeded solely from the sense of duty, it would be obedience, but it could not be charity or devotion. Yet conscience operates along with them; its approbation follows close upon their earliest motions, it attends them in all progressive exertions, it encourages and animates them, it invigorates them, by inculcating that the divine authority is interposed in their favour.

THAT subjection of heart to the law of God, which we have now explained, is a very important temper. It is indispensibly due to God as our lawgiver, our sovereign, and our king. Capable of perceiving the right of a superior to command us, we cannot, on the least reflection, but feel the right of the Supreme to exact the observance of all his precepts. It is most beneficial to ourselves. It is the most immediate preservative from sin. It is the firmest support, and the surest guard of every virtue. If it prevail, universal holiness must quickly ensue. It alike secures, but with the distinction belonging to their natures, the practice of the moral virtues, and the observance

servance of the positive appointments of God's will; determining us to *do the one, and not leave the other undone**, but to *walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless* †.

CULTIVATE this temper with care suitable to its importance. Meditate often on the sacredness and supremacy of the divine authority. Form awful conceptions of it, and render them familiar to you, that you may learn to reverence the laws which are derived from it. Consider all the reasons on which these laws are founded; they will endear them to you. You have been in situations of perplexity, in which you were at a loss how to act; the council of a wise and good man would have then been, of all things, the most desirable: without the laws of God, every step of your conduct would be perplexed and intricate, and every moment you must be uncertain what you ought to do; they are the directions of infinite perfection for the whole of your behaviour; shall not his *commandments* then be our *delights*? They *give us understanding*, that we may *live* ‡, accustom yourselves to think and act according to them. Bring every motion which rises in your hearts, and every action

* Mat. xxiii. 23.

† Luke, i. 6.

‡ Psal. cxix. 143, 144.

which

which you intend, to the test of duty. Invite your conscience to pronounce impartially, whether it be right or wrong. If it declare that it is forbidden, if it be even doubtful whether it is allowed or not, invariably forbear it. To venture upon any thing till every suspicion of its innocence be removed, is to offend conscience, and to sin presumptuously against God. What you are satisfied that he requires, let no temptation prevail upon you to neglect. Implore the divine assistance to conquer the disobedience and corruption of your hearts, and to *renew you in the spirit of your mind* *; to *take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and give you an heart of flesh, and put his spirit within you, and cause you to walk in his statutes, and to keep his judgments, and do them* †.

* Eph. iv. 24.

† Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.

S E R M O N VIII.

REGARD TO THE JUDGMENT OF GOD.

I S A. xxxiii. 22.

The Lord is our Judge.

THE constitution of human nature permits us not to be indifferent to the sentiments of others concerning our character and conduct. A total disregard to them would shew depravity of soul; a great unconcernedness about them would betray the want of that delicate sensibility which is inseparable from true worth. The judgment of the virtuous and discerning is, for its own sake, an object of affection to every human heart: their good opinion we desire with ardour, and reflect upon with joy; their ill opinion we regard with aversion; to have incurred it, overwhelms us with sorrow and confusion. But if we be particularly connected with them, especially if we in any respect depend upon them, their good or their ill opinion, by being of
advantage

advantage or disadvantage to us, becomes still more interesting.

RELIGION eradicates none of these determinations of nature. It grafts its exertions on them as their proper roots. From inadequate objects, it turns them to an object perfectly adequate. It teaches us that *the Lord is our judge*. It requires us to pay a supreme and constant regard to the judgment of that God, who alone can justly estimate our character, and whose estimation of it is of infinite importance to us. This regard is an essential part of the duty which we owe to God; and it is a powerful incitement to that course of life which is pleasing to him, and productive of our own happiness, both in this world and in the next.

In the present discourse, I propose to consider it, *first*, in its principle; and *secondly*, in its operation.

FIRST, I shall point out the proper *principle* of a supreme regard to the judgment of God. It is in brief a lively conception of God,—as our omniscient witness,—as necessarily approving or disapproving us,—and as our proper and righteous governor, who will reward those whom he approves, and punish those whom he disapproves.

I. GOD is continually present with us, intimately acquainted with our real characters, the witness of all our thoughts, and words, and actions. By this he is qualified for being in an eminent sense *our Judge*. It is but a small part of our behaviour, of which any man can be an eye-witness; and even that part he may know but imperfectly: he sees our actions, but he can often only guess at our motives and our intentions. Of many of our actions he is wholly ignorant; and therefore he can form no opinion about them. But there is not a particular of our heart or our life, of our temper or our conversation, exempt from the judgment of God; for he knows and observes all things. *The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good* *. *His eyes behold, his eye-lids try the children of men* †; *doth not he see my ways, and count all my steps* ‡? *For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings* §. When thou performest an act of beneficence with such secrecy that *thy left hand knoweth not what thy right hand doth* ¶; when, in the retirement of thy closet, the sigh of penitence, or the aspiration of devotion, rises from an upright heart, it is not unobserved by *thy Father which seeth in secret* **. *Neither is the iniquity of men hid*

* Prov. xv. 3.

† Psal. xi. 4.

‡ Job xxxi. 4.

§ Prov. v. 21.

¶ Mat. vi. 3.

** Ver. 6.

from his eyes †; he sets our iniquities before him, our secret sins in the light of his countenance ‡. O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me: thou understandest my thoughts afar off: and there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me before and behind. *Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence ||?* When a person is present with us, his sentiments concerning us become the object of our liveliest attention; were he at a distance, we could perhaps think of them with more indifference. God is never far from every one of us §; he is more intimately present with us than any creature can be. It requires no stretch of imagination, to conceive him privy to our inmost thoughts, to every rising passion, to the most hidden propensities of our souls: it requires only that we really believe what is absolutely certain. We may be, we ought to be, as strikingly sensible of his presence as of our own being; *for in him we have our being***. We may be as deeply convinced of his knowledge of all our motions, as of our own consciousness of them. His knowledge of them is more perfect than our own: we may forget them, but he cannot; we may impose a false representation of them even upon ourselves,

† Jer. xvi. 17.
2. 4, 5. 7.

‡ Psal. xc. 8.
§ Acts, xvii. 27.

|| Psal. cxxxix. 1,
** Ver. 28.

but

but not upon him. *For the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts* *; and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart: neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do †.

2. THE God who is perfectly acquainted with all our dispositions and our actions, cannot behold any one of them with indifference: he observes them on purpose to estimate their real nature: he necessarily approves or disapproves them. It is this that renders his knowledge of them important. We would consider ourselves as alone, in the presence of a person who could not discern between right and wrong. It is our being endued with a moral nature, with a power which distinguishes good from evil, and regards them with contrary sentiments, that renders one man at all capable of judging concerning the character and conduct of another. It is that divine perfection, of which this ruling faculty of the human soul is the image and the offspring, that renders *the Lord our judge*. He possesses absolute rectitude of nature: he not only is pure from all moral evil, but he holds it in abomination;

* 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. † Heb. iv. 12, 13.

he not only is perfect in all moral goodness, but he loveth goodness. An invariable love of virtue and hatred of vice is necessarily implied in his essential rectitude, and it is the first principle of his justice. Without this attribute, he could neither perceive nor approve his own excellence; and with it, he cannot but approve, favour, and be pleased with whatever is right, and disapprove, condemn, and be offended with whatever is wrong, in the characters and behaviour of all his reasonable creatures. *The Lord God is the holy One, of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity* *. *Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness; neither shall evil dwell with thee: the foolish shall not stand in thy sight; thou hatest all workers of iniquity: the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man* †. *I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord* ‡. *For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, his countenance doth behold the upright* ||; *he delighteth in his way* §. There are seasons in which every human heart feels and proclaims, that there is indelibly impressed upon it a sense that this is the character of God. If it were not, vain and absurd would be the complaints and the appeals which na-

* Hab. i. 12, 13.

† Psal. v. 4, 5, 6.

‡ Jer. ix. 24.

|| Psal. xi. 7.

§ Psal. xxxvii. 23.

ture irresistibly prompts innocence blackened by calumny, and integrity overpowered by injury, to send up in groans to him who knoweth all things, *Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts* *. Prejudice and mistake may pervert the judgment of men; their conscience may be corrupted, and they may *call evil good, and good evil* †. Yet fallible as their judgment is, to pay it no regard would be unnatural: no little fortitude is often requisite for preventing the sensible heart from paying it some regard, even when it knows it to be wrong. *But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth* ‡: *by him actions are weighed* ||. His holiness is unerring as his understanding, and perfect as his nature: its decision can never fail to be ratified and enforced by the full conviction of our own hearts; it demands unlimited respect. The depravity of men often deadens their moral sentiments; both the approbation and the disapprobation of the vicious is slight and languid, and it is accounted of little weight. The vigour of these sentiments, and our deference to them, rise in proportion to the worth of the person who expresses them. *But there is none holy as the Lord* §: compared with his immaculate light, all created excellence is as darkness: *yea the heavens are*

* Isa. vi. 3.

† Chap. v. 20.

‡ Rom. ii. 2.

|| 1 Sam. ii. 3.

§ 1 Sam. ii. 2.

not clean in his sight * ; *and his angels be charged with folly* †. The strength, the intenseness of his approbation and disapprobation, who is incapable of passion or emotion, we cannot properly conceive: to intimate that it is great, the sacred writers speak of it in terms borrowed from the most ardent passions and the keenest emotions, which the moral qualities of others produce in our souls; they represent him as loving, delighting, and taking pleasure in our goodness, and viewing our sins with hatred, abhorrence, wrath, and indignation.

3. THIS omniscient and holy God is our proper and righteous governour. This brings his approbation and disapprobation directly home to us; it implies that they will be attended with the weightiest consequences; it calls forth self-love to support the sense of honour. *The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our law-giver, the Lord is our king.* The judgment of men often reaches only to favourable or unfavourable sentiments of us; their esteem is all that we can hope for, their blame all that we can incur. If they have authority over us, if their influence and power can promote or obstruct our interest, their opinion of our character assumes a new importance. *The wrath*

* Job, xv. 15.

† Chap. iv. 18.

of a king is as the roaring of a lion ; but his favour is as dew upon the grass *. Honour or dishonour in the eye of the all-perfect Being, are for their own sake deeply affecting to every ingenuous mind : but to every soul of man that is not dead to thought, they must, on account of the infinite moment of their consequences, appear to be of infinite importance. *The Lord most high is terrible ; he is a great king over all the earth : he reigneth over the nations, sitting upon the throne of his holiness* †. God is the sovereign and the moral governour of mankind ; he will employ omnipotence for the support of his government ; his approbation will be followed by a great reward, his disapprobation by dreadful punishment. He observes and estimates our actions, not as a spectator, but as our ruler : when he *searcheth the heart and trieth the reins*, it is that he may judge the righteous and the wicked, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings ‡.

God has formed us the proper subjects of moral laws. Both by the dictates of our nature, and by the precepts of his word, he has prescribed us laws. His having prescribed them necessarily implies that he will make a dis-

* Prov. xix. 12.

† Psal. xlvii. 2, 8.

‡ Jer. xvii. 10.

Eccl. iii. 17.

ference between the obedient and the disobedient. The natural sense of good desert in virtue and of ill desert in vice, which in every man shews itself in a variety of shapes, is an express declaration from him who formed us, that he will make the difference. He forces us to interpret and receive it as a certain intimation of his designs; apprehension of punishment is inseparable from the consciousness of guilt, but the reflection that we have done our duty inspires the hope and expectation of reward. The state in which God has placed us, is adapted to our moral nature; it gives scope for our voluntarily obeying or voluntarily transgressing his laws. His providence towards us in this state, is a plan of government by these laws. By the unalterable constitution of things, what he requires tends to our peace and joy, what he forbids, to our disquiet and pain: and by the dispositions of his providence, they often actually produce these contrary effects. Our condition is generally the consequence of our behaviour; and frequently it is easy or uneasy, according as our behaviour has been moral or immoral. Some of the prosperous and the adverse occurrences of life, conscience, of its own accord, constrains every man to consider as marks of God's favour to righteousness, and his displeasure against sin. *We are verily guilty; therefore is this distress*
come

come upon us *, has at times been the unwelcome suggestion of nature to every sinner. We feel that we are accountable to God; and we have experience that he sometimes calls us to an account. That it is but sometimes, that often in the present world *there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked* †, proceeds only from this, that in the present world the plan of God's righteous government is but in its beginning: it is no proof that it will not be completed; it is a confirmation that it will. The beginning of a righteous government infers its progress and its accomplishment: its imperfection in the present state, proclaims that there will be another state in which it will be perfected; it requires it for vindicating the ways of God. A state of retribution presupposes an opportunity of trial; and the appointment of a season for trial, is the pledge of an exact and equal retribution. None of the irregularities of the present world, neither success in vice, nor unsuccessfulness in virtue, can erase from the soul of man a conviction of the final justice of God's government: there are moments in which the most prosperous wickedness shudders with apprehensions of him *to whom vengeance belongeth* ‡; and oppressed innocence often looks up with confidence to God, as its re-

* Gen. xlii. 21.

† Eccl. ix. 2.

‡ Psal. xciv. 1.

fuge, its avenger, and its recompence, saying in its trouble, *Not for any injustice in mine hands; also now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high* *. *Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth* †.

THE scripture every where justifies the conviction, and unfolds the designs, of a perfectly righteous government; assuring us that, in spite of all the present appearances of disorder, *the Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works* ‡. For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil ||. The dispensation of our redemption by Jesus Christ, which displays the marvellous *grace and compassion* of God, displays, at the same time, in the most striking manner, the inviolable *sanctity* of his government of mankind. While it provides for the pardon of sin, the blood of Christ shed for the expiation of sin testifies how odious, how deserving of punishment, it is in the sight of God. While it secures mercy to the penitent, it seals the condemnation and the misery of every impenitent sinner. It extends reward to the mixt and imperfect virtues of weak men; but it extends it only in favour

* Job xvi. 17. 19.

|| Eccl. xii. 14.

† Psal. lviii. 11.

‡ Psal. cxlv. 17.

to the perfect righteousness and sinless obedience of the Son of God. The same revelation which informs us of this dispensation of grace, teaches us with new light and evidence, that this world is the season of our trial, and that at the end of it God's favour to righteousness, and his wrath against all iniquity, will be proclaimed in the face of the whole universe. It gives assurance unto all men, that he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness*; that the Son of man, unto whom the judgment is committed by the Father†, will come to execute it, encompassed with all the glories of heaven; that we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether good or bad‡; and that they who are in that day approved as righteous, shall be recompensed with eternal life || and happiness; but they who are found to be wicked, shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord§. If then either honour or happiness, either disgrace or misery, can make an impression on us, the judgment of God may make the deepest and the most permanent impression.

• Acts, xvii. 31.

† John, v. 22.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 10.

|| Mat. xxv. 46.

§ 2 Thess. i. 9.

A CONCEPTION of God as, in this manner, our all-seeing witness, necessarily pleased or displeased with us, and our absolute and righteous sovereign, is the natural principle of a supreme regard to his judgment of our character and conduct. If it fail of producing this in creatures susceptible of a sense of character, concerned how they appear in the eyes of men, often involuntarily touched with the unjust censure or the undeserved praise even of those who possess not their high esteem; the conception cannot be lively, it cannot be embraced with faith, it cannot be entertained with sincerity.

SECONDLY, Let us now consider, in what manner a regard to the judgment of God will operate and exert itself. It is not a mere impression on the understanding; it is likewise an active motion of the heart. It includes a deep sense of the importance of his judgment, a supreme value for it, an earnest and steady attention to it, an habitual solicitude how all our habits and our actions will appear in his sight, and a constant care to render them such as will bear his eye. God's judgment concerning every one of us, is either a judgment of approbation, or a judgment of disapprobation. Each of these will produce different affections, according to the several aspects under which
our

our opinion of ourselves leads us to view it; and all of them the most important and commanding. To be approved and beloved, or to be disapproved and hated, by the ruler of the universe! Immense is the distance between these two states! To hang in suspense between them, to be drawing the lot for the one or the other, is a situation fit for agitating the soul with the most vehement emotions, and for drawing out all its powers in the most vigorous exertions. It is the situation of every human creature in this period of trial. Disapprobation from God, is the extremity of disgrace and misery; approbation from him, is the summit of honour and of happiness: the former is the natural object of fear, sorrow, and shame, exciting to circumspect avoidance of it; the latter of ardent desire, elevating hope, and rapturous joy, conspiring to animate us in the eager pursuit of it. Let us briefly unfold these opposite movements of the soul.

I. WHEN we consider God as disapproving all sin, a pious regard to his judgment will exert itself in fear, sorrow, or shame, according to the light in which we conceive ourselves to be viewed by him.

ANY

ANY possible or probable evil is the object of our fear. The wrath of that God in whose hand is the soul of every man, is the greatest of evils; and by wickedness it cannot fail to be provoked; in all, therefore, who are in danger of wickedness, it may justly awaken the most awful apprehensions. *The Almighty is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice; men do therefore fear him* *. The fear of God, the dread of disapprobation and punishment from him, is the most obvious expression of respect to his judgment. It is the native result of the reflection, that we are in a state of trial for eternity. The very idea of trial implies a possibility of failing; and where the issue is so important, a bare possibility of failing would be a formidable danger. But our danger is far more formidable: we are weak; we are already lapsed apostates; our state abounds with strong temptations to sin: it is encumbered with circumstances which render it very difficult to avoid it. *Narrow is the way which leadeth unto life* †; it runs along the edge of an unfathomable precipice; it is choaked up by briars and thorns. If you have any sense of him *who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work*, you cannot but *pass the time of your sojourning here*

* Job, xxxvii. 23, 24.

† Mat. vii. 14.

in fear *. Every one of us has already gone through some part of his trial; and in that part of it, every one of us has already failed. The impotence of humanity admits not perfect purity; *all have already sinned* †, *in many things we offend all* ‡: we have forfeited the approbation of justice; we can have recourse only to the indulgence of mercy. The best are conscious of many infirmities, many defects, and many sins. When a tender conscience sets these before their eyes, when they place these in the light of God's purity, they cannot think without awe, what may be the consequences of them under his holy government: *how should man be just with God? If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand* ||: *enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified* §. If their sincerity be so fully ascertained as to cast out the fear of final punishment, yet it excludes not the apprehension of rebuke and correction for their faults. Though they were also secure from this, they could not bear, without concern, the thought of deserving to be blamed by God.—But when conscience tells the heinous sinner, that he has *corrupted all his doings* ††, that he has chosen those ways which are hateful to God, and against which his

* 1 Pet. i. 17.

† Rom. iii. 23.

‡ Jam. iii. 2.

|| Job, ix. 2, 3.

§ Psal. cxliiii. 2.

†† Zeph. iii. 7.

fierce

fierce anger is denounced, what, except insensibility, can prevent his being alarmed with the terrors of the living God? He looks up with consternation to the offended purity and omnipotence of his Judge; and with a trembling heart cries out, *He hath kindled his wrath against me, and he counteth me unto him as one of his enemies* *. *What then shall I do when he riseth up? And when he visiteth, what shall I answer him* †? *What must I do to be saved* ‡? Roused to an agonizing perception of his danger, he deprecates the wrath to which he is obnoxious, with anxious importunity: *O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger: Have mercy upon me, O Lord* ||. *Hide thy face from my sins; and blot out all mine iniquities* §. Such fear of God's displeasure against sin, is generally the first motion of the corrupted soul towards him: and if it be not violently suppressed or heedlessly dissipated, it will work repentance; for by repentance alone the displeasure of the holy God can be averted, and the forgiveness of sin obtained.

FEAR always includes a mixture of sorrow, which becomes more intense in proportion to the greatness of the evil, and the probability of our incurring it. *It is a fearful thing to fall*

* Job. xix. 11.

|| Psal. vi. 1, 2.

† Chap. xxxi. 14.

§ Psal. li. 9.

‡ Acts, xvi. 30.

into the hands of the living God *: in the apprehension of this, sorrow must be the predominant ingredient. The miserable consequences of his displeasure are not altogether future: though *the wicked be reserved to the day of destruction* † for the full punishment of his sins, the beginnings of that punishment often tread close on the commission of them: *thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy back-slidings shall reprove thee*; and thou shalt know and see that it is an evil thing, and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God ‡: the nearness, the imminence of this danger, is fit for wringing the heart with grief. The displeasure of God is not an evil to which the sinner is only obnoxious: he has already incurred it: *God is angry with the wicked every day* ||; his wrath is kindled, though it has not burnt forth; *he hath bent his bow, and made it ready* §, though his arrows have not yet proved the instruments of death ¶. In the consciousness of this, the sinner who has become sensible of the discriminating eye of perfect sanctity marking all his paths ||||, mourneth for his sins, and is troubled. His fear is aggravated into sadness, and his sadness is ruffled by all the anxieties of fear. His spirit is broken, his heart is contrite ††. He

* Heb. x. 31.

† Job. xxi. 30.

‡ Jer. ii. 19.

|| Psal. vii. 11.

§ Ver. 12.

¶ Ver. 13.

|||| Job. xxxiii. 11.

†† Psal. li. 17.

sorrows to repentance †, to the reformation of his ways. His heartiest repentance, his most effectual reformation, cannot prevent sorrow from sometimes overcasting his soul: it is recalled by every failing, it is renewed by every trespass: he is grieved that he cannot avoid every action and every thought which is disapproved by his God; the sensibility of his spirit makes every imperfection in his temper the object of deep regret.

ANY evil can produce fear and sorrow, but the disapprobation of God is likewise fit for producing shame and humiliation in every person who is conscious that he has incurred it. Whatever we consider as bringing a stain upon our characters, naturally excites these sentiments. To be detected in what is base, confounds the feeling heart, though no farther inconvenience be apprehended. To be lost to shame, is the last stage of degeneracy. To deserve blame from God, is the deepest ignominy; it must cover every man with confusion who has any sense of God. When the man who has multiplied his transgressions as the sand, is awakened to a just view of what he has done, and of what he is; when he perceives with anguish, that he is odious to God, and all his ways abominable in his sight; he *lies down*

† 2 Cor. vii. 9.

in his shame *; he cannot lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven; he smites upon his breast, saying, *God be merciful to me a sinner* †; O Lord, unto me belongeth confusion of face, because I have sinned against thee ‡. Not a wicked action of his life, not an evil thought of his heart, is unknown to the holy Judge of the world; they have all been indulged and perpetrated in his very presence. They were marked by God, when himself was regardless of them; they were disapproved by God, when himself was unconscious of their baseness; and they will at last be published to men and angels. He feels himself deserving of *everlasting contempt* ||. How shall he appear? How shall he be able to bear his shame? He is in his own eyes abased to the dust. It is not the heinous sinner alone who is obnoxious to shame in the sense of God as his judge. Ingenuity of spirit is always in proportion to virtuous improvement; it enables reflection, on the smallest sin, to overspread the good man's face with secret blushes. Even his best services sink him low in his own esteem, because they are imperfect. Every new failing reiterates his inward abasement; every devout thought of its offensiveness to perfect purity, revives the impression of his shame.

* Jer. iii. 25.

† Dan. ix. 8.

‡ Luke, xviii. 13.

|| Chap. xii. 2.

THE fear, the sorrow, and the humiliation, which arise in sinful man from an habitual sense of God's holy government, are not confined to those seasons in which serious reflection on ourselves excites remorse. The violent emotions unavoidable in these seasons, subside gradually into permanent sentiments. They dwell upon the spirits of the saints; they mix themselves with all their thoughts and actions. They make them to proceed through life with unremitted caution; to take every step with circumspect attention; to exercise steady care in avoiding every transgression and every omission displeasing to God. *The fear of the Lord is to hate and to depart from evil* *. *Happy is the man that feareth alway* †. The exertions of the good man are not enervated by timidity; but they are guarded by wary concern that they may be blameless. Unfurnished by dejection, they are all tinged with seriousness; remote from meanness, they all shew poverty of spirit. The sense of his danger banishes arrogance from his heart; and the consciousness of his faults hides pride from his eyes. *He walks humbly with God* ‡. Modesty, diffidence, lowliness, sober-mindedness, are leading qualities in his temper, and render his conduct innocent and pure.

* Prov. viii. 13. Job, xxviii. 28.

† Prov. xxviii. 14.

‡ Mic. vi. 8.

2. A DEVOUT sense that *the Lord is our judge*, turning our view to his approbation of virtue, will produce ardent desire, elevating hope, or rapturous joy.

HIS approbation is the sublimest honour; the rewards which attend it are the purest happiness. But what is sinful man, that he should dare to look for honour or reward from the God of heaven? If his piercing eye should search us with severity, or mark all our iniquities, the thought even of escaping his displeasure would be blind presumption. *What is man that he should be clean? And he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous*?* But our God is merciful: *he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust†*: he maketh gracious allowance for the weakness of our nature. By the dispensation of Christ's perfect obedience unto death, he hath made provision for granting his acceptance and his favour to the defective virtues of the upright. *Though all the world be guilty before God, so that by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight, yet through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, God is the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus‡, with that true faith which purifieth the heart||, and work-*

* Job, xv. 14. † Psal. ciii. 14. ‡ Rom. iii. 19, 20, 24, 26.
 || Acts, xv. 19.

eth by works, and by works is made perfect *. Whoever is sincere, is accounted *worthy* †; *his transgression is forgiven, his sin is covered, the Lord imputeth not iniquity unto him* ‡; it is *blotted out from his sight* ||. Whatever is good in him, however weak, however mixt with evil, is *acceptable to God by Jesus Christ* §, and will *be found unto praise, and honour, and glory at his appearing* ¶. *Eternal life* is too great a felicity to be merited by the spotless innocence of any mortal man; it is the *free gift of God through Jesus Christ* ††; it is the overflowing of his love to righteousness; it is an astonishing display of the exuberant riches of his grace. Yet even to it our way is opened by the mediation of his Son; it is secured to the obedient by the promise of God, who cannot lie.

AUTHORIZED by the indulgent dispensation of the gospel to aspire to *praise of God* ¶¶, can we think of it with indifference? Can we hear without throbbing hearts, the Almighty condescending to proclaim to man, *I will set him on high, because he hath known my name, and I will honour him* ††. If honour from man can engage a wish, honour from God may well draw forth all the ardour of the soul. Compared with this, the applauses of the

* Jam. ii. 22.

† Rev. iii. 4.

‡ Psal. xxxii. 1, 2.

|| Jer. xviii. 23.

§ 1 Pet. ii. 5.

¶ Chap. i. 7.

†† Rom. vi. 23.

¶¶ 1 Cor. iv. 5.

‡‡ Psal. xci. 14, 15.

whole world, and the favour of all its potentates, are worthless. *Ye receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only* *, is the description of a character of extreme abjectness, no less than of abominable wickedness. Honour from God solicits our most fervent desires; it demands all the efforts of our ambition; it is an object worthy of ambition. Of the soul that perceives its value, the earnest cry will be, *Lord lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us* †. The desire of it will give a direction to our whole conduct. It will impel us to *walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work* ‡; it will determine us to *labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him* ||. It will give spirit and elevation to all our endeavours to perform *the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God* §; for it sustains them by the prospect of true glory, of renown in the complacency, love, favour, and applause of the all-perfect Ruler of the universe.

THE approbation of God rests not in complacency; his favour is inseparably connected with reward. By walking so as to please God, we shall be in his grace entitled to his peculiar protection, to his unerring care for our real

* John, v. 44.

† Psal. iv. 6.

‡ Col. i. 10.

|| 2 Cor. v. 9.

§ Rom. xii. 2.

interest in this world, and to all that happiness in the next, which can proceed from the munificence of him who delights in communicating blessedness. Desire of his approbation implies the desire of our own greatest happiness. It has sometimes been represented as mean and mercenary to be influenced by this desire. But the representation is an absurd affectation of refinement, alike inconsistent with the frame of human nature, and the doctrine of holy writ. Genuine self-love is, next to conscience, the highest principle of the heart: it was placed there on purpose to render us steady in the prosecution of our happiness: it is invested with authority to controul all the passions which would attach us to immediate gratifications and advantages destructive of our highest interest, which would mislead us into the pursuit of apparent good inconsistent with real felicity. If we mistake the nature of human happiness, that principle will carry us astray, it will disappoint itself, and plunge us into misery. But when it is directed to those satisfactions which God has annexed to virtue, and to those unspeakable joys which he will bestow in approbation of it, it is a worthy principle of conduct, it is the powerful guardian of integrity, it is the certain guide to everlasting pleasures. These joys are highly honourable, for they are earned by virtue: they are *full of glory,*

glory *, for they are the marks of the favour of the King of kings. The desire of them shews a soul whose views are enlarged to look beyond the sphere of sense, and whose powers have risen superior to all the allurements of the world. The scripture is far from blaming the desire of them. On the contrary, it represents the best men as continually actuated by it; as *looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder is God* †; as *having respect unto the recompence of reward* ‡; as *pressing towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus* ¶. And it expressly commands us to *look at the things which are not seen, which are eternal* ||, and to *set our affection on things above* §. To inflame the desire, it paints the rewards of the righteous in the most glowing colours; to support it by hope, it gives every assurance that they will be conferred on all who *please God, and diligently seek him* **. It proposes, it inculcates them as motives to action; and if our desire of them bear any proportion to their value, they will be powerful motives. Desire leads us in every case to that conduct by which its objects may be obtained. Desire of reward from God will determine us to perform the conditions on which he has promised it, and to acquire the habits which

* 1 Pet. i. 8. † Heb. xi. 10. ‡ Ver. 26. ¶ Phil. iii. 14.
|| 2 Cor. iv. 18. § Col. iii. 2. ** Heb. xi. 6.

can qualify us for enjoying it. It will determine us to forsake every sin; for impenitence in any sin is the forfeiture of heaven. It will produce careful application to every duty; for the appointment of God is, *If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments* *. It will instigate us to *perfect holiness* †; for we must be *like God, to see him as he is* ‡. It will draw out our activity, and inspirit our labour by firm confidence, that *it is not in vain in the Lord* ||.

REGARD to the judgment of God is not completed by desire: when the consciousness of our own sincerity warrants our indulging the pleasant thought, that ourselves are approved of him, the happy objects of his favour, the heirs of immortal glory, it breaks forth into triumphant hope and joy. This sublimest hope, this purest of joys is not hid even from mortal man. *Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God* §. Neither the remembrance of the *sins that are past* ¶, nor the sense of many remaining stains and failings, can exclude the sincere Christian from this exalted privilege; for the remission of these, the clemency of the new covenant has made full provision. The faintest

* Mat. xix. 17.

† 2 Cor. vii. i.

‡ 1 John iii. 2.

|| 1 Cor. xv. 58.

§ Rom. v. 1, 2.

¶ Chap. iii. 25.

sense

sense of our acceptance with God, though shaded by diffidence and doubt, is a ground of serenity of soul. But when by *the spirit bearing witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ* *, we can assure our hearts before him †, it is *the peace of God, which passeth all understanding* ‡. *The hope of the righteous is gladness* ||. Joy is always one element in the composition of hope; and it predominates in proportion to our opinion of the greatness and the certainty of the good hoped for. Religious hope is the firm expectation of our supreme dignity and happiness. It includes not only expectation of the future enjoyment of God, but experience also of his present favour. It establishes in the soul a temper of the most unclouded cheerfulness; it elevates it at times into triumph and rapture. It fans an inextinguishable flame of gratitude; and sends it upwards in *high praises to God* §, *who hath made him accepted in the beloved* ¶. *Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin* **. *Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased* §§. The all-penetrating eye of God, so terrible to the sinner, is become to the

* Chap. viii. 16, 17. † 1 John, iii. 19. ‡ Phil. iv. 7.

|| Prov. x. 28.

§ Psal. cxlix. 6.

¶ Eph. i. 6.

** Psal. lxxxv. 2.

§§ Psal. iv. 7.

man who feels himself approved in his sight, the exhilarating, the encouraging eye of his friend and his father. He is no longer *troubled at his presence**: the sense of it is his chiefest joy; it is his consolation in every gloomy hour: *He knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold†. Thou wilt bring forth my righteousness as the light, and my judgment as the noon-day‡. His hope not only prompts to activity, but inspires alacrity in serving God; it enlarges his heart to run the way of his commandments||; it enables him to go on, not with diligence only, but with rejoicing; it renders the hardest labour easy, and the greatest efforts pleasing. It secures his unremitted perseverance, that he may hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of hope firm unto the end§: having tasted how sweet it is, the thought of forfeiting it by inconstancy or defection, would be anguish to his soul. His hope and his joy brighten in proportion to his progress: they dispel the shadows of the valley of death¶, they illuminate the land of darkness itself§§: they strengthen his heart to cry out with exultation, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me: henceforth there is laid up for me a*

* Job, xxiii. 15. † Ver. 10. ‡ Psal. xxxvii. 6.

|| Psal. cxix. 32. § Heb. iii. 6. ¶ Psal. xxiii. 4.

§§ Job, x. 22.

*crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day *.*

SUCH are the native exertions of a pious regard to the judgment of God. According to the different situations of our own hearts, it will produce fear of displeasure and punishment from him, or sorrow and shame in the reflection that we have deserved it; desire of approbation and reward, or hope and joy, in the thought that we are entitled to it. These unite their energies in the checquered temper of the good man, and mitigate and qualify one another. Amidst all the faults of our nature, all the imperfections of our temper, and all the deviations of our conduct, desire and hope prevent our fears from degenerating into terror and despair, and our sorrow and humiliation from sinking us into dejection and despondence: and amidst our most satisfying reflections, and our sublimest prospects, the sense of our danger, and the consciousness of our innumerable failings, restrains our hope from becoming presumptuous, and our joy from elating or throwing us off our guard. Derived from the same fountain, they again mix their streams, and run forward in one even current. They form a temper in which

* 2 Tim. iv. 8.

sedateness and ardour, gravity, and cheerfulness, circumspection and spirit, caution and confidence, are happily blended together. It is at once a barrier against heedlessness and levity, and an incitement to activity and enterprise. It is alike remote from the horrors of superstition, and the swellings of enthusiasm.

ALL the parts of this temper have the very same tendency; they impel us with their complicated force, to avoid every vice, for every vice is displeasing to God, and inconsistent with his favour; and to practise every virtue, for every virtue is pleasing to him, and will be rewarded by him. If this temper be real, it will be powerful: if it exist, it will be a ruling and leading principle; its influence will be discernible in the whole tenour of our behaviour; every act of vice, every neglect of duty proclaims some defect in our recollection, that *the Lord is our judge*. A lively sense of this will make us as solicitous for the innocence of our most secret actions, as for the blamelessness of those which are most open. To be exempt from the observation and the censure of men, is nothing: *behold, I have seen it, saith the Lord**; and *I will recompence it †: the darkness hideth not from him, but the night*

* Jer. vii. 11.

† Heb. x. 30.

*shineth as the day**. It will render us as attentive to the purity of our thoughts, as to the decency of our behaviour: they are alike exposed to the judgment of God. It will be the preservative of sincerity; it will secure the conformity of our intentions to our professions, and of our principles to our actions; it will force us to feel that hypocrisy is foolishness: by it ye may *justify yourselves before men, but God knoweth your hearts* †; *he seeth not as man seeth, he looketh not on the outward appearance, but on the heart* ‡: and when the Lord shall come, *he will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts* §. Awed by this conviction, *till I die I will not remove my integrity from me; my righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live: for what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul* §.

A PREVAILING regard to the judgment of God, is the most effectual antidote against infection from the erroneous opinions of men concerning good and evil. Desirous as we naturally are of avoiding their censure, and obtaining their esteem, both, whenever they

* Psal. cxxix. 12. † Luke, xvi. 15. ‡ 1 Sam. xvi. 7.
 || 1 Cor. iv. 5. § Job, xxvii. 5, 6. 8.

are misplaced, will appear despicable to the man who is possessed of that regard. Corrupt fashion, presuming to authorize what God disapproves, or to explode what he approves, will be accounted but the silly caprice of fools. Attempts to palliate or justify any thing that is immoral, or to throw ridicule on any thing that belongs to virtue, will be neglected as no better than the ravings of insanity. Wherever the misjudgings of erring mortals run counter to the estimation of the infallible arbiter of right and wrong, they will be slighted and derided. If every sensible man prefers the esteem of a few able judges to the applauses of an ignorant multitude, he must be as destitute of good sense as of religion, who can hesitate in preferring honour from God, to the good opinion of the whole universe. *With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of man's judgment: but he that judgeth me is the Lord**. Every expectation, every apprehension, that can be entertained in consequence of the good or the ill opinion of men, vanishes at the thought of what will result from our being acquitted or condemned by God. *They can only kill the body; be not afraid of them: but fear him who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell†*. Their smiles are often deceitful, al-

* 1 Cor. iv. 3. 4. † Luke, xii. 4, 5.

ways insignificant : but *in his favour is life ¶, his loving-kindness is better than life **.

ALL the present pleasures and advantages which sin can offer, will be unable to seduce the man who preserves a lively sense of the heavenly Judge : for they bear no proportion either to the happiness which accompanies his approbation, or to the misery which arises from his wrath. *For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works †.* All the losses, troubles, and perils to which virtue can expose him, will not have power enough to terrify him from the love and practice of it : for *the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us ‡.* Convinced that *no man knoweth either love or hatred, by all that is before them ||* ; looking beyond the inequalities of the state of trial, fixing his eye on the perfect display of God's impartial righteousness which is to take place in the eternal state of recompence, he will in every situation *do good, and wait patiently for the Lord §, not fretting*

¶ Psal. xxx. 5.

* Psal. lxxiii. 3.

† Mat. xvi. 26, 27.

‡ Rom. viii. 18.

|| Eccl. ix. 1.

§ Psal. xxxvii. 3. 7.

*himself in anywise to do evil**, nor suffering himself to say, *I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency* †. Conscious that he is observed by God, animated by the sense of his acting his part before so august a presence, he will exert all the powers of his soul to act it well. In the exertion he will feel a noble expansion of heart, and triumph in the hope of being approved and rewarded: and his hope shall not be disappointed, its largest promises shall be surpassed by the greatness of his reward.

* Psal. xxxvii. 8.

† Psal. lxxiii. 13.

S E R M O N IX.

THE CONFIDENCE OF THE RIGHTEOUS AT
THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

I J O H N, ii. 28.

*And now, little children, abide in him; that
when he shall appear, we may have confidence,
and not be ashamed before him at his coming.*

THAT the belief of the future judgment may the more effectually influence our conduct, the scriptures represent it as a solemn process, attended with many sensible circumstances easily and strongly apprehensible. That it may give motion to all our springs of action, they place it in a great variety of lights. Sometimes they describe it as a tremendous event, fit to alarm our fears, and to enforce anxious vigilance and circumspection. At other times they set it forth as what good men have reason to love*, as *the day of their redemption*†, the commencement of their eternal

* 2 Tim. iv. 8.

† Eph. iv. 25.

life, the prospect of which may comfort them amidst their present sorrows, dispel all temporary fears, and produce alacrity and cheerfulness in virtuous practice. It is in this light that my text has placed it. John, with an authority to which he was entitled both as an apostle and as an old man, and with a tenderness of affection for which he was remarkable, addressing Christians by the appellation of *little children*, and exhorting them to *abide in Christ*, to continue steadfast in the faith and practice of his religion, enforces the exhortation by this argument, *that when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming*. It is a very persuasive argument. The coming of the Son of God to judgment, is the terror of wicked men: they avoid the very thought of it as insupportable; and in the hour of judgment, their shame and confusion, their anguish and misery, will surpass all that their terror had foreboded. Even good men cannot always look forward to it without painful concern. The possibility of their not being fully prepared for a trial, the consequences of which are everlasting, must at times excite some apprehensions in those who are conscious of many imperfections. To be able to *look for the coming of the day of God* * with entire tran-

* 2 Pet. iii. 12.

quillity,

quillity, to be qualified for welcoming its solemnities with firmness and intrepidity, and for standing before the Lord, the righteous Judge, with boldness and joyful confidence that he will acquit us, and put us in possession of all the joys of heaven: how invaluable is the privilege! By inviolable sincerity and persevering diligence in universal holiness, it may be certainly attained.

It is this alluring, this animating motive to Christian virtue, that I now propose to inculcate on you. I propose to evince, that the steadfast practice of it will give you assurance and joy at Christ's awful appearance to judge the world. In prosecution of this design, I would lead you to observe,

FIRST, That Christian virtue naturally produces these effects in this world; and

SECONDLY, That the intention and the circumstances of Christ's appearance will secure its then producing them in an higher degree.

FIRST, That Christian virtue will inspire confidence and joy at the coming of Christ to judgment, we may fairly conclude from its

naturally producing these effects in the present world.

THIS will not require a laboured proof: its evidence lies within yourselves; for perceiving it, you need only attend to what passes in your own hearts when you reflect upon your conduct. You have experience that conscience sometimes approves, and sometimes disapproves you; and you cannot but be sensible that both its approbation and its disapprobation imply an anticipation, a presentiment of the consequences of your actions, as well as a judgment concerning their nature. Its disapprobation includes not only regret and sorrow for our having done amiss, but apprehension also that we shall suffer for it. Its approbation includes not only pleasure in the conviction that we have done right, but a sense that we deserve well by what we have done, and hope that it will contribute something to our happiness. Fearfulness is so essential to an evil conscience, and confidence to a good conscience, that by them the wise man characterizes the vicious and the virtuous: *The wicked flee when no man pursueth; but the righteous are bold as a lion**. Along with satisfaction in reviewing the past, a good conscience begets tranquillity in the prospect of the future.

* Prov. xxviii. 1.

It gives a sense of security; it infuses hope, often even assurance, that it shall be well with us. This is a part of that peace of mind, which it establishes; this forms one distinction between it and every other joy; and to a reasonable creature, prone to look forward, inevitably solicitous about what shall befall him hereafter, this renders a good conscience the most important of all joys.

HOPE springs so naturally from consciousness of virtue, that a single good action produces some degree of it, though we know ourselves to be very faulty in other particulars. We reckon ourselves secure, at least as to the consequences of that action. If it meet with praise, if it bring us honour or advantage, we accept them as our right: if it be misconstrued and censured, we are disappointed, we feel with indignation that we are injured, and hug ourselves in the sense of our integrity. It cherishes good hope, not only towards men, but also towards God: it leads us to expect his blessing on it. The expectation is so natural, that bad consequences, proceeding from a well-intended and worthy action, have sometimes surprized even religious persons into a momentary arraignment of the justice of Divine Providence. It is so natural, that it enables the man, whose good deeds are traduced, or repaid with evil, to appeal

peal to God for their rectitude, and fearlessly to plead that he will vindicate them. In relation to the particular crimes with which David was falsely charged by his enemies, he often addresses God, in words which seem to besit only innocence: *Hear the right, O Lord, attend unto my cry, give ear unto my prayer that goeth not out of feigned lips; let my sentence come forth from thy presence, let thine eyes behold the things that are equal: thou hast proved mine heart, thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing**. Judge me, O Lord, for I have walked in mine integrity: examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart: I will wash mine hands in innocency; so will I compass thine altar, O Lord†. Of the like confidence towards God, dictated by the consciousness of integrity in some particular instance of calumniated behaviour, we find examples every day. We have all experienced it in ourselves. It is not confined to the uniformly virtuous,

BUT the consciousness of uniform virtue, of genuine and habitual holiness, produces a boldness and confidence of a more enlarged and important nature. A particular good action can give confidence only in respect of its proper consequences: but universal and per-

* Psal. xvii. 1, 2, 3.

† Psal. xxvi. 1, 2. 6.

severing goodness begets a sense of security in respect of the final result of our whole behaviour. It inspires and it sustains the blessed hope of a state of pure and permanent happiness. By the favour of him who made us, this glorious privilege is annexed to the upright obedience of his will. By his appointment in the moment of our creation, *the work of righteousness is peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and assurance for ever**. Sinless obedience would produce full and uninterrupted assurance of happiness. But in every human breast, the sense of innumerable failings, and of some heinous offences, raises doubts and apprehensions which often break the fulness of assurance. Yet so great is the power of virtue, that the testimony of conscience for the habitual sincerity of our hearts, can generally dispel our fears, and support our expectation of approbation and reward from God, notwithstanding the multitude of our imperfections. Encouraged by that testimony, we no longer tremble at the rigour of inexorable justice; we look up to the indulgence of divine mercy with humble confidence.

It is only, we must confess, the dispensation of redemption by Jesus Christ, that lays a

* Isa. xxii. 17.

sure foundation for a guilty creature's confidence in God; it alone can render his trust rational and consistent; it alone can warrant the sons of men to aspire to so transcendent an happiness as that of heaven. Yet so congenial is this confidence and trust to the virtuous soul, that even into those who were wholly ignorant of that dispensation, a good conscience has always infused the hope of a future happiness, and of an happiness greater than can be found on earth. The best of the heathens pleased themselves with the expectation, of living after death in the society of all the great and good men of former ages. It was nature itself that raised the expectation; the God of nature authorized it. The dispensation of redemption was decreed by him before the world began: he had it in his eye when he created man: he adapted human nature to the whole of that state for which he designed human creatures: he framed its constitution with a reference to the secret intentions of his grace. He therefore impowered conscience to suggest to all good men, hopes which are unaccountable to mere reason, which can be justified only by the revelation of a merciful dispensation, rendering repentance available to the forgiveness of sins, and entitling our imperfect and unprofitable service

vice to the reward of perfect and endless happiness.

To us, Christians, this revelation is vouchsafed. By it we are assured, that God has already reconciled the world to himself by Jesus Christ; that by his sacrifice the pardon of sin is obtained for every penitent; that by the merit of his obedience unto death, the inconceivable glory of heaven is purchased for all who sincerely obey the gospel; that he has already entered into heaven, to *make intercession for us**, and as *our fore-runner*†, to *prepare a place for us*‡. This revelation resolves the doubts of nature, confirms its hopes, and brightens its prospects. Enlightened by it, a good conscience exerts itself with unimpaired force. The Christian's hope is enlivened and invigorated by faith. *Having his heart sprinkled from an evil conscience*, he can look up to God *in full assurance of faith*||; he can rejoice in steadfast hope that he shall enjoy the divine protection and favour in this world, and that, when he is called to his great account hereafter, he shall be acquitted from his sins, *saved from wrath*§, and blessed with everlasting happiness. *Beloved, if our heart condemn us not,*

* Rom. viii. 34.

† Heb. vi. 20.

‡ John, xiv. 2.

|| Heb. x. 22,

§ Rom. v. 9.

then

*then have we confidence toward God**. Our confidence is built upon promises numerous and explicit. It is strengthened by the testimony of the Holy Spirit, *which is the earnest of our inheritance*†. Of Christian virtue, therefore, *everlasting consolation and good hope through grace*‡, are the native fruits.—If the sense of many defects and frequent lapses hinders some who are habitually sincere, from reaping these fruits, it can be imputed only to their defections and their sins: completer and more consistent virtue would have secured their peace of mind. If a melancholy and timid temper, or mistakes concerning the terms of the Christian salvation, overcast their souls with a causeless gloom, it is only an accidental cloud intercepting, for a season, the light and comfort to which their virtue gives them a right.

MOST of our joys are transient, and most of our hopes fallacious; they wither in the day of trouble, they vanish in the hour of death. But the joy and the hope of a good conscience are permanent. Far from being blasted by affliction, they often draw nutriment from it, and flourish in unwonted freshness when sorrows most abound. By the pres-

* 1 John, iii. 21.

† Eph. i. 14.

‡ 2 Theff. ii. 16.

sure

sure of adversity, the good man becomes recollected in himself; his spirit is roused within him; his fortitude is called forth. *A conscience void of offence toward God and toward man* *, is his only remaining refuge: he finds it a source of unusual intrepidity; he derives from it a firmness of hope, and a fullness of joy, which he never knew before. *Even in his death the righteous hath hope* †. At the approach of death his hope often becomes more lively: the doubts which at times perplexed him disappear: the sins which often alarmed his fears, he perceives to be relinquished and pardoned: the infirmities for which he often mourned, he sees to be compassionate. Eternity looks less formidable, in proportion as it is viewed nearer, and discerned more clearly. He feels himself by grace entitled to that *eternal life, which is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord* ‡. Without anxiety or dread, he is able to *commit the keeping of his soul to God* ||. He resigns it in calm confidence that he shall be raised again to immortal happiness.

Thus, steadfast virtue is necessarily attended by a good conscience; and a good conscience

* Acts, xxiv. 16.

† Prov. xiv. 32.

‡ Rom. vi. 23.

|| 1 Pet. iv. 19.

necessarily

necessarily inspires hope, boldness, and confidence towards God. If these be the present consequences of a virtuous course, how can we entertain a doubt that it will likewise produce the blessed consequence by which the Apostle recommends it in the text? If these accompany the good man through life, and forsake him not in the dark hour of death, why should they desert him in the bright morning of the resurrection? If they have strength enough to endure all the storms which beat upon them in this world of turbulence, why should they die away when they are transplanted into the regions of serenity which are exempt from every storm? If faith in Christ *unseen* can now preserve them, is it possible that they should be extinguished when our eyes shall *see* him, on whom we have believed, coming in his glory? Shall that hope, which supported itself when it was deferred, begin to languish when it is just ready to be fulfilled? It cannot fail, on the contrary, to rise into firm assurance and undisturbed joy.

For completing the proof of this, we proposed, **SECONDLY**, to shew, that the design and the circumstances of Christ's appearance are such, as must increase the boldness and confidence of all who have been sincerely and habitually holy.—Can it then be, that they

will not rather destroy it? Is not *the day of the Lord great and very terrible? And who can abide it**? Very terrible it will be to the wicked; but to the righteous it will be comfortable. It is common for the same object to produce contrary effects on contrary tempers. Let us in thought transport ourselves for a little to the judgment of the last day.—The Scripture has in part revealed its solemnities: let us consider how they may naturally be expected to affect the man whose temper and conduct have through life cherished good hope towards God. Awful and striking they doubtless are: the faintest conception of them will give us a feeling sense of the importance of that intrepidity which, through their progress, the righteous alone will be able to preserve; but the fullest detail of them could not raise a suspicion that they will break the firmness of the virtuous soul.

ALL the preparations for the judgment of the world, will be awful. When *signs shall be seen in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; when the sea and the waves shall roar; when the powers of heaven shall be shaken; when the sign of the Son of man shall appear in heaven; who among all that are alive and remain unto*

* Joel, ii. 11.

*the coming of the Lord, can stand undismayed? There will be upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity, all the tribes and kindreds of the earth mourning and wailing, men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth**. But from this consternation, the righteous of every tribe, and kindred and nation, are exempt. Their wonder is without amazement, their awe is void of terror, and their expectation of anxiety. *When these things begin to come to pass, they look up and lift up their heads, for they know that their redemption draweth nigh†*. The convulsions of nature which they behold around them, are the appointed preludes to its completion; and their greatness only indicates the immensity of its value.

WHILE the living see these signs, the dead shall hear *the trump of God, and the voice of the Archangel‡*, commanding them to arise. It tumbles down the vaulted sepulchres; it rends the foundations of the mountains; it shakes the depths of the ocean: but it shakes not the soul of the righteous, nor disturbs his thoughts. The moment it reaches his ear, he knows it to be the call to immortality: the moment he awakes from the grave, he finds himself par-

* Luke, xxi. 25, 26, 27. Mat. xxiv. 30. 1 Theff. iv. 15.
 Rev. i. 7. † Luke, xxi. 28. ‡ 1 Theff. iv. 16.

taker of *the resurrection of the just* *. If the light of the morning is cheering to man, the dawning of eternal day must be transporting. The joy of a prisoner released from the dungeon in which he has been long confined, is faint, in comparison of their joy who, by the opening of the grave, have now *obtained the everlasting redemption of their body* †. A resurrection unto life has always been *the hope* and the *comfort* of the Christian ‡: when the hope is now accomplished, when he has already *attained unto the resurrection of the dead* §, it must be unmixed joy. At death *the spirits of just men are made perfect* ||: and rising at the last day, conscious of their being perfect, they cannot but be certain that they *shall not come into condemnation*, but have *come forth unto everlasting life* ¶. Their very senses assure them, that they are *the children of the resurrection*, who *cannot die any more* **, for they inform them, that they bear no longer *the image of the earthy*, but *the image of the heavenly* ††. They see with their eyes, they feel through their whole frame, that their bodies are raised *spiritual, in incorruption, in glory, in power* ‡‡ — In a moment too, in the twinkling of an eye, at

* Luke, xiv. 14.

† Rom. viii. 23.

‡ Acts, xxliii. 6.

§ Theff. iv. 18.

§ Phil. iii. 11.

|| Heb. xii. 23.

¶ John, v. 24.

** Luke, xx. 36.

†† 1 Cor. xv. 49.

‡‡ Ver. 42, 43, 44.

the last trump, the living, who had not fallen asleep, *shall be changed, this corruptible putting on incorruption, and this mortal immortality**. The quick and the dead together experience in themselves *mortality swallowed up of life*†: Christ hath already *changed their vile body*; it is *fashioned like unto his own glorious body*‡. With what ineffable rapture will they then enter into the full sense of that triumph, which the Apostle has expressed as strongly as the feebleness of mortal language can admit, *Death is swallowed up in victory: O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ*§!—Every thing is gone, which could check or abate their triumph. The avocations of sense cannot for a moment divert the consciousness of their purity: the objects of sense cannot impress a feeling of uneasiness to damp their joy in that consciousness. They have now no mortal part, from which vapours can rise, to involve their hearts in heaviness.—Imperfect conceptions of God, or of themselves, cannot now mislead them into doubt, or distract them with gloomy apprehensions: the knowledge which was *in part, is done away; that which is perfect, is come*||. No possibility of future perils or temptations can infuse

* 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52, 53. † 2 Cor. v. 4.

‡ Phil. iii. 21.

§ 1 Cor. xv. 54, 55, 57. || Chap. xiii. 10.

the least grain of diffidence, to adulterate their gladness: every danger is surmounted; temptation is annihilated; their trial is finished; *the last enemy death is destroyed* *. Their confidence is the security consequent on a victory already gained; their joy is the triumphant exultation of the conqueror. The humble and timid Christian, whose evening was overcast with clouds, who could not resign his spirit without solicitude and trembling, awakes in sunshine, filled with gladness, rapt into extasy. The steadfast Christian, who was, even in his earthly state, delivered from *the spirit of fear* †, who lived and who died *rejoicing in hope of the glory of God* ‡, forgets all his former peace in the exuberance of delight which now flows in upon him. Not with the firmest persuasion of faith, or *the fullest assurance of hope* §, but with the infallible certainty of experience, they cry out, *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? In all things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us* || !

AROUND them, they behold the multitudes of men innumerable, who have peopled all the regions of the earth, from the creation to the last day. Of these many have *awaked to shame and everlasting contempt* ¶. The haggard

* 1 Cor. xv. 26.

† 2 Tim. i. 7.

‡ Rom. v. 2.

§ Heb. vi. 11.

|| Rom. viii. 35, 37.

¶ Dan. xii. 2.

form of the wicked, the confusion of their faces, the trembling of their joints, proclaim that they have *come forth unto the resurrection of damnation* *. Were the righteous man accessible to fear for himself, the sight of the wicked would instantly banish it: his whole figure is a contrast to theirs; their visible despondence, of which he bears no mark, confirms his confidence; their desperation proves the importance of his own security, and elevates his joy in it.—He finds himself in a great company of saints: they differ, *as one star differeth from another star in glory* †; but in glory they all appear. They wear robes of immortality resembling his own: like himself, they look up with confidence, and are not ashamed. He mingles in *the general assembly of the first-born* ‡; he congratulates, and is congratulated by them; they recognize each other as kindred spirits, companions in tribulation and in patience, fellow-labourers and fellow-conquerors, compatriots of the kingdom of heaven. By associating together, by the mutual contagion of heart-felt sentiments, they are more emboldened, their confidence invigorated, and their joy exalted.

* John, v. 29.

† 1 Cor. xv. 41.

‡ Heb. xii. 23.

THEN

THEN shall they see the Son of man, coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory*. But they shall see him without fear. It is the Son of man. The Judge of the world comes in human nature: a pledge of his mildness and equity in judging human creatures; a token that he *can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities*; for in that nature, he was in all points *tempted like as we are*†: an intimation that he acknowledges his relation to them; a cheering, an elevating evidence that *he is not ashamed to call them brethren*‡; an assurance that he will present them to his Father, saying, *Behold I and the children which God hath given me*§! It is he who came in abasement, to redeem the world. It is he who died, that he might become the Saviour of the obedient. It is he who has already expiated all their failings by his blood. After his resurrection, it is certain that his *hands bore the print of the nails*, and his *side* the mark of the spear||, by which his blood was shed: and probably his body will retain these signatures of his philanthropy and grace, when he returns to judge the world. He has always been for true Christians *an advocate with the Father*¶. He can-

* Mat. xxiv. 30. Mark, xiii. 26. Luke, xxi. 27.

† Heb. iv. 15.

‡ Chap. ii. 11.

§ Ver. 13.

|| John, xx. 25, 27.

¶ 1 John, ii. 1.

not but make the most gracious allowances for all their imperfections. Before this merciful Judge, how should they who, through life, studied to abide in him, but have confidence and boldness? Instead of shrinking from his presence, they welcome him with shouts, *Lo, this is our Lord, we have waited for him, and he will save us; we will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation* *.

LET the wicked tremble at his coming: to the righteous, the purpose of his coming is the most exhilarating. He who *was once offered to bear the sins of many*, now unto them that look for him, *appears the second time, without sin, unto salvation* †. He appears on purpose to dispense the mercy of God to all who have accepted it. He appears to display the munificence of God to all who have served him in sincerity. This is the time to which good men always looked forward by faith, with earnest expectation, for the accomplishment of the *precious promises* ‡ of the gospel. This is the time of which Jesus said, *I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also* §. *Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me* ||.—
Assuredly conscious that they have adhered to

* Isa. xxv. 9.

† Heb. ix. 28.

‡ 2 Pet. i. 4.

§ John, xiv. 3.

|| Rev. xxii. 12.

the terms of God's salvation, and are entitled to the great reward, their joy is full. The faith by which they were wont to eye it, is improved into sight. The hour is come, in which they are to *receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away* *: they perceive it ready: with alacrity they stretch out their hand to take hold of it.

SUCH being the Judge, and such to them the purpose of his coming, the *glory and power* with which he comes cannot possibly abash them. On the contrary, these encourage their confidence and exultation. They are the ensigns of his majesty, who is their patron and their friend: they are the badges of his authority to seal their salvation: they are the evidences of his power to bless them. They add spirit to their boldness, and rapture to their gladness. The splendour, the treasures, and the forces of a sovereign, terrifying to his enemies, are, in proportion to their greatness, the protection, the pride, and the boast of his loyal subjects. Great shall be the glory of the Son of man at his appearing.—*He shall come in his own glory* †. The majesty of his person is awful: but only guilt unforgiven can render it tremendous. The righteous, delivered from the guilt of all their sins, can con-

* 1 Pet. v. 4. † Luke, ix. 26.

template it without confusion. They contemplate it with deep veneration ; but their veneration has no mixture of pain or dread ; it is like the solemn reverence of the happy spirits who surround the throne of God, and *always behold his face* *, replete with sedate and placid enjoyment. The glory of the Son of man is magnificent : viewed without terror, it can only exalt and expand the soul. It is the dignity of perfect excellence : it gratifies the noblest faculties with the sublimest of delights, It is the effulgence of divine benignity, ravishing to the heart. The word of truth has assured us, that *in that day, the Lord shall be glorified in his Saints, and admired in all them that have believed* †. To them, *his eyes* brighter than *a flame of fire*, confounding to the sinner as the flashes of lightning, beam mildness and condescension. To them, *his countenance as the sun shining in his strength*, is not dazzling, but splendid and cheering. To them, *his voice*, loud as the sound of many waters ‡, is only grand and elevating. To them, the glories of his person are animating and transporting, not only as being the security, but also as being the exemplar of their own immortal glory.— For he has promised to them, *that when he shall*

* Mat. xviii. 10. † 2 Thess. i. 10. ‡ Rev. i. 14, 15, 16.

appear,

*appear, they shall be like him **, that they shall be glorified together † with him, that the glory which his Father gave him, he will give them ‡. Astonished with the brightness of his glory, how must they triumph in the thought of being quickly cloathed with the like glory!

HE shall come *in his Father's glory* §: not only invested with his authority, but attended by his Shechinah, the token of his immediate presence. It was always the pledge of his kindness to his people: when *it filled his house, they praised the Lord, saying, For he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever* ||. It is now the evidence of the completion of his kindness. It is the assurance that henceforth *the tabernacle of God is with men, and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them, and God himself shall be their God* ¶.

HE shall come *with all the holy angels* **; an innumerable company ††, a glorious retinue of mighty spirits. At the sight of one of them, man in his mortal state has oftener than once been terrified: but *the children of the resurrection* feel themselves equal to the angels ‡‡.—

* 1 John, iii. 2. † Rom. viii. 17. ‡ 1 John, xvii. 22.

§ Mat. xvi. 27. Mark, viii. 38. Luke, ix. 26.

|| 2 Chron. vii. 3. ¶ Rev. ix. 15. xxi. 3.

** Mat. xvi. 27. xxv. 31. Mark, viii. 38. Luke, ix. 26.

†† Heb. xii. 22. ‡‡ Luke, xx. 26.

They

They behold them with pleasure, attending their Lord, to contribute to his glory. They know that he has brought them with him, on purpose to subserve their own advancement; to *minister for the heirs of salvation* *; to GATHER them together from one end of heaven to the other †; to *severe them from among the wicked*, that they may *shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father* ‡.

UNAPPALLED they shall see the Judge sit upon the throne of his glory §, and all nations assembled at the judgment-seat. Even rejoicing, they shall stand before it. It is the tribunal to which they were always accustomed to appeal from the injustice of men: it is the tribunal from which they constantly expected the reward of all their labours, ample compensation for all their sorrows, the sentence which was to fix them immutably in perfect happiness. It is now erected. Their assurance is confirmed, their joy rises as they approach to it. To them, it is *the throne of grace* ||. The tranquillity of their reflections makes them certain that they shall *be found in peace, without spot, and blameless* ¶. When the judgment is set, and the books opened **, all the procedure sup-

* Heb. i. 14.

† Mat. xxiv. 31.

‡ Chap. xiii. 43, 49.

§ Chap. xxv. 31. || Heb. iv. 16.

¶ 2 Pet. iii. 14.

** Dan. vii. 10.

ports and augments their boldness. When they meet the eye of the Judge, it smiles upon them with complacency, and darts new rays of gladness into their souls. He judges his *people with equity* *. *In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me* †, is his indulgent construction of their good actions. Their frailties are excused by his clemency, *who remembereth that they were dust* ‡. Their sins are mercifully covered: they were forsaken, and they are no more imputed to them. Partakers of *the redemption which is in Christ* §, they are, in the gracious acceptance of the Judge, *holy, and without blemish, and unreprieveable in his sight* ||. *They are found written in the book of life* ¶.—*They are caught up together in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air* **. They are *set on his right hand* ††. Sentence is pronounced in their favour. It is proclaimed through the universe, that they are justified, approved, and glorified. The King places them *with him on his throne* ‡‡. He authorizes them, with him, to *judge the world, and the angels* §§. The dimness of the most assured faith, the feebleness of the most established hope, is now no more: it is superseded by the clearness of vision and the fulness

* Psal. xcvi. 9.

† Mat. xxv. 40.

‡ Psal. ciii. 14.

§ Rom. iii. 24.

|| Eph. v. 27. Col. i. 22.

¶ Rev. xx. 15.

** 1 Thess. iv. 17.

†† Mat. xxv. 33.

‡‡ Rev. iii. 21.

§§ 1 Cor. vi. 2, 3.

of fruition. Their whole frame is joy, rapture, triumph.

WHAT, though nature be all in flames; *the elements melting with fervent heat; the heavens on fire, passing away with a great noise; the earth, and the works that are therein, burnt up**! The conflagration cannot excite either a fear or a sorrow in their happy souls. The saints, when sustained only by faith in God invisible, had such a superiority to the most frightful commotions of nature, which themselves too might *be involved in, and suffer from, as enabled them to say, God is our refuge and strength: therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof†*. How perfect then will their superiority be to the final convulsions of nature, when they shall see God, and when they shall know that the wreck of worlds can give no disappointment to their desires, no disturbance to their peace. They behold it, not only unconcerned, but exulting. They know that the things which have been, are now dissolved, only that from their ruins, refined by fire, there may arise, according to God's promise, *new bea-*

* 2 Pet. iii. 10.

† Psal. xlii. 1, 2, 3.

vens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness *.—*He that sitteth upon the throne, saith, Behold I make all things new* †. The glorious edifice rises at his word. It is *the holy city* ‡ of the great God, the spacious mansion of eternal delight. The righteous enter into it, and there live and reign in glory and joys inconceivable, *for ever and ever* §.

Thus,—both from the hope which accompanies the consciousness of virtue in the present life,—and from the fitness of all the circumstances of the judgment, to raise the hope of the virtuous into assurance, and convert it into triumph,—it is evident, that if, by the diligent practice of all virtue, we *abide in Christ, we shall have confidence when he shall appear, and not be ashamed before him at his coming*. Can there be a more blessed prospect? Can there be a stronger incentive to indefatigable diligence and un-deviating constancy in Christian virtue? By this conduct alone it is attainable. In the present world, in this land of darkness and deceitfulness, the wicked may flatter and solace themselves with delusive hopes of mercy and favour from God; but these will vanish, as the dreams of the night, at the approach of the eternal day. In this world, the false confidence of the hypo-

* 2 Pet. iii. 13.

† Rev. xxi. 5.

‡ Ver. 2.

§ Chap. xxii. 5.

crite, the daring boldness of the enthusiast, the blind presumption of the thoughtless sinner, may rival, or even outshine, the humility of Christian hope; but in the day of wrath, they shall perish; it alone shall continue and increase. In this world, religion has its joys, the purest, the most satisfying, that belong to the lot of mortal man. They are small in comparison with those which await good men when they shall be raised to immortality; they are but like the earliest dawn in comparison with the meridian light: but as the dawn presages the perfect day, they are earnest of those exalted joys. If we act in such a manner as to secure present *rejoicing in the testimony of our conscience* *, we shall likewise be able to rejoice in the great day of the Lord. Undaunted we shall hear the sound of *the last trump* †. With gladness we shall perceive that we are *not found naked but clothed* ‡ with incorruptible bodies. Undazzled our eyes shall see *the Son of man coming in his glory* §: his majesty shall be the confirmation of our hopes. Intrepid we shall stand before his judgment-seat, undergo our trial, and wait for our sentence. Enraptured we shall hear the sentence of approbation pronounced in our favour. Consciously secure we shall look on the fall of dissolving worlds. We

* 2 Cor. i. 12.

† 1 Cor. xv. 52.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 3.

§ Mat. xxv. 31.

shall see a more stupendous fabric raised. We shall be received into it, and be for ever *with the Lord**.

If we would keep this glorious prospect continually in our eye, it could not fail to determine us to that holy conduct by which alone it can be realized to us. No temptation could have art or strength enough to defeat its influence. The most fascinating pleasures of sin could not entice us, if, in the moment of their solicitation, we reflected, that by venturing to taste them, we shall forfeit our confidence, and be covered with shame, in the important day when *every one of us shall give account of himself to God*†. No danger, no difficulty, no loss, no suffering, could deter us from our duty, if, in the moment of its assault, we preserved a lively sense, that every danger which we bravely face, every difficulty which we strenuously combat, every loss which we resolutely incur, every pain which we patiently endure, rather than neglect what is good, or do what is evil, will add a wreath to our crown of rejoicing in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming‡. With whatever violence corrupt appetites and passions rage within us, we would reckon no self-denial too severe, no labour too

* 1 Thess. iv. 17.

† Rom. xiv. 12.

‡ 1 Thess. ii. 19.

hard, no vigilance too intense, no perseverance too fatiguing, in order to subdue and mortify them, if we maintained a permanent conviction, that every ungoverned propensity is *a root of bitterness springing up to trouble us* *, that we must conquer before our tranquillity can be established, that we can triumph only in consequence of a victory.

WHETHER the remembrance of gross transgressions or feeble wavering will impair the confidence and debase the joy of those who are upright on the whole, while they are rendering their account and expecting their sentence, I presume not to determine. But certain it is, that it disturbs their present peace, enervates their hope, overwhelms them with sorrow, fills them with melancholy thoughts, and often occasions their meeting death with terror and dejection, and leaving this world with perplexing doubts, or despondence, concerning their eternal state. And certain it likewise is, that inconstancy or heinous offences will lessen their happiness in heaven. *He which soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly* †. *The nobleman advanced his servants in exact proportion to what each had gained by his pound* ‡. To be unstable in holiness, to be often starting aside

* Heb. xii. 15. † 2 Cor. ix. 6. ‡ Luke, xix. 16—19.

into faulty actions, even though we again recover ourselves by repentance, comes not up to the full import of *abiding in Christ*: nor can be expected completely to ascertain our right to the glorious privileges which attend it. If we would be sure to *give account with joy**, we must study to render our virtue pure, our goodness uniform, our obedience persevering, our improvement continually progressive.—Then shall *the Lord stablish our hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints*†. Wherefore we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not shaken ‡, nor fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in grace §.

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen ||.

* Heb. xiii. 17.

† 1 Thess. iii. 13.

‡ 2 Thess. ii. 1, 2.

§ 2 Pet. iii. 17, 18.

|| Jude, 14, 15.

S E R M O N X.

THE SELF-CONDEMNATION OF THE
WICKED AT THE DAY OF JUDG-
MENT.

L U K E xix. 22.

— *Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee,
thou wicked servant.*

THE future judgment is in many respects
awful to all men, and dreadful to the
wicked. But no circumstance renders it more
dreadful to them than this, That in the day
of judgment they shall be self-condemned.
To be self-condemned is exquisitely painful.
The wicked sometimes feel the torment of it
in this world; they are always exposed to it:
and when they shall be called to judgment,
they cannot possibly escape it. This reflection
binds down upon the guilty soul all the ter-
rors of that tremendous season, and must be a
powerful motive to that repentance and reform-
ation which will deliver us from the ago-
nies

nies of guilt. The text naturally suggests it to our thoughts. It is part of a parable spoken by our Saviour. Alluding to the state of Judea, at that time a Roman province, parts of which were bestowed by the emperours on tributary princes, he represents a nobleman going into a far country, to receive a kingdom; calling his servants together before his departure; giving each of them a piece of money to improve during his absence; returning after having received the kingdom; calling them to an account for the money which he had entrusted to them; applauding those who had improved it, and rewarding them in proportion to the degree of their improvement; but condemning one who had hid the money in a napkin: first, *judging him out of his own mouth*, and then commanding him to be punished. The meaning of the parable is this: Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has ascended into heaven, to receive from his Father the kingdom and dominion over all, and has left his followers to improve the advantages which they enjoy by their reasonable and moral nature, and by revelation; will return at the end of the world, will call them and all mankind before his judgment-seat, will munificently reward his faithful servants according to their deserts, but will force the wicked to condemn themselves out of their own mouths, their

conscience accusing them, anticipating their sentence, and bearing witness to its justice. By seriously reflecting on this misery at present, we may avoid it, we may be excited to forsake those sins which will produce it, and, in the diligent practice of holiness, obtain, in its stead, the approbation of our own minds, brightening the solemnity of the judgment into gladness, and assuring us of everlasting happiness as the issue of our trial. May this be the effect, as it is the sincere design, of the reflections which we propose to offer on the confusion and anguish, which, at the coming of the Son of God to judgment, all the wicked shall endure, in being self-condemned! That these reflections may, by the grace of God, produce conviction, I shall shew,

FIRST, That by the state of their minds in this world, the wicked are prepared for being self-condemned, and enduring all the horrors of guilt in the day of judgment; and,

SECONDLY, That the nature and circumstances of the judgment will awaken the sense of guilt, and raise the anguish of their self-condemnation to extremity.

FIRST, To be convinced that wicked men cannot escape self-condemnation at the day of judgment.

judgment, we need only consider what is the state of their minds in the present world. It cannot be better illustrated, than by the account which the wicked servant, censured in this parable, gives of himself. *Lord, behold here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: for I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou laidst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.* His plea confutes itself. His conduct was the reverse of what his professed opinion of his master's character naturally dictated. He knew that his lord would demand more than he had lent him; yet, by laying it up unemployed, he rendered it impossible that he could return him more. Palpable as the inconsistency was, he never attended to it during the absence of his lord: but he instantly convicted him by the very justification which he offered, and caused him feel that he had already condemned his own practice by his avowed sentiments: *Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: wherefore then gavest thou not my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required my own with usury?* The question was unanswerable; he was silenced and confounded. Perfectly similar is the condition of the wicked. Their practice is contradictory, though often they perceive it not, to their nature, to their principles,

principles, to what they are, to what they believe, to what they profess; and is condemned by all these.

EVERY man has conscience in his breast, to point out his duty, to command him to perform it, and to reprove him when he transgresses it. Every man is sensible, and at times shews, that he has conscience, and that he has it for this very purpose. When it has lost the power of enforcing obedience to its dictates, it notwithstanding continues long to excite a painful sense that they ought to be obeyed. Hence the shuddering reluctance which precedes the perpetration of iniquity; and hence the cutting remorse which attends reflection on it. What sinner is there, who never had experience of these? Which of you dare say, that you were perfectly easy in your vices when you first engaged in them, and till you had by habit gradually steeled your heart against the sense of guilt? Or can the most obdurate among you deny, that, after all your endeavours to elude the agonies of guilt, they still break in upon you on some particular occasions? Indeed, if we saw not the wicked at greater ease, than it is possible to be, under the actual feeling of this self-torment, we could not doubt that they endured it constantly, while they remained conscious of impenitence

nitence in any sin. For every sin is a violation of our nature, a violation of *the law* of God *written in our hearts* *, an act of rebellion against conscience, to which God hath given a right to govern us, and authority to chastise our disobedience; and therefore every sin is the proper object of its rebukes, and essentially worthy to be condemned by it.

Thus every sinner is self-condemned as he is a man, condemned by his own nature; we moreover call ourselves Christians; and every sinner is likewise self-condemned as he is a Christian; he is condemned by his faith, condemned by his profession. You live in the habitual practice of sin; yet you believe the scripture to be infallible truth, which forbids, and threatens punishment against every sin. Thou livest,—I speak to every individual who knows that he is guilty,—in impurity, in fleshly lusts, in drunkenness, in debauchery; yet thou acknowledgest that divine revelation by which God hath called us *not unto uncleanness, but unto holiness* †, and which teacheth us to *live soberly* ‡. Thou art unjust, dishonest, oppressive, malicious, revengeful, envious, censorious, slanderous, uncharitable; yet thou receivest that religion which teacheth men to

* Rom. ii. 15.

† 1 Thess. iv. 7.

‡ Tit. ii. 12.

live righteously *, and whose end is charity †: Thou indulgest impiety, profanest the name of God, disregardest his authority, repinest against his providence, livest without any habitual sense of him; and nevertheless thou ownest the divinity of that book which requires that *denying all ungodliness, we should live godly ‡*, and which assures us, that love to God is the first and great commandment ||. Thou committest what God has forbidden; and yet knowest that they which commit such things are worthy of death §. Thou addest iniquity to iniquity; and yet believest that the great Judge will say, *Depart from me ye that work iniquity: I never knew you ¶*. What is this but to believe, and to know, that you have incurred eternal death?

WHILE sinners continue men, their nature pronounces them worthy of punishment; while they call themselves Christians, their faith sentences them to the pains of hell. Remorse wringing them with anguish, and appalling them with terrors, sometimes awakens them to a distracting sense that they are in this manner self-condemned: and even when they elude remorse, they often betray their

* Tit. ii. 12.

† 1 Tim. i. 5.

‡ Tit. ii. 12.

|| Mat. xxii. 38.

§ Rom. i. 32.

¶ Mat. vii. 23.

sense of their being notwithstanding self-condemned. Else why do we seek to disguise or conceal our vices? Or why are we ashamed when they are detected? Is not this to acknowledge that we disapprove them, and know that they deserve to be disapproved by all men? Or why do we condemn vice in others, often the very vice in which we indulge ourselves? What is this, but in judging another to give sentence against ourselves? The inconsistency is very common. The legislator enacts laws, and fixes heavy penalties against crimes in which himself lives. The magistrate executes the laws on his fellow-subjects for offences from which himself is by no means free; he passes sentence on them for dishonesty, while himself is guilty of partiality, oppression, or corruption; he inflicts death on the murderer, while himself sheds innocent blood under the forms of public justice. The preacher denounces the vengeance of God against sins which stain his own practice. One man censures another, or indignantly prosecutes him, for transgressions notoriously chargeable upon himself, or which he indulges in another form, or with greater secrecy, or from which he has abstained only for want of opportunity. By all this, we judge ourselves in another man's person, and proclaim that, even when we are easiest in our sins, we *condemn ourselves in that thing which*

which we allow *. Is it possible then that any person who lives in sin, can avoid condemning himself when he shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ?

It is very true that, in this life, the wicked are not always sensible of their being self-condemned. But can this be any security,—I will not say, against the judgment of God—but against the judgment of their own hearts hereafter? They are already actually self-condemned: to make them sensible of it, is all that is wanting to render them miserable. If in this life they never became sensible of it, what would it avail them? A criminal under sentence of death may fall asleep, and lose all consciousness of his condition; but is he therefore not condemned to death? or is it therefore impossible that he should ever again reflect on his being condemned? And if the wicked are now so fast asleep, so thoughtless, so stupid, as to have lost all consciousness of their guilt, is this a proof, is it so much as the faintest presumption, either that they are not really guilty, or that they shall never feel themselves guilty? There are many objects in this world fit to divert or to blunt the feeling of their real state: but at the

* Rom. xiv. 22.

resurrection, these shall be all removed; and what can obstruct it then? The present tranquillity of the sinner gives him no security against the tortures of an evil conscience, even throughout this life. He needs only think seriously but for one hour, of what he is, and what he has done, to be wretched. On the most incidental recollection of his more heinous sins, regret, dissatisfaction, shame, terror, consternation, rise and seize upon him, like tormentors let loose from hell, to punish him before the time. Often when he affects a cheerful countenance, often when none suspects his hidden woe, the fiends which haunt the guilty breast prey inwardly upon him, and make him miserable in his own reflections and forebodings. Can they fail then to invade him in the awful hour of his final judgment? They will assault him with tenfold rage. Their wounds will be all empoisoned with the corroding venom of despair.

Thus, sinners, the present condition of your souls evinces that you must be self-condemned at the day of judgment. You are already condemned in your sins by the essential principles of your own nature, and by that religion which you believe and profess. You are in this manner self-condemned, even when you have no sense or thought of it: often you are
awakened,

awakened, in the present world, to the cutting sense of it; and overpowered with remorse, shame, and fearful apprehensions: these are the imperfect foretastes, and they are the express intimations, the certain pledges of that unspeakable anguish, confusion, and terror, to which you shall certainly be awakened at the day of judgment. For,

SECONDLY, The nature and circumstances of the judgment are such as cannot fail to rouse the wicked to the sense of their whole guilt, and to aggravate it beyond endurance. Only fix your attention for a moment, on the solemn process, on the awful transactions of the day of vengeance; and doubt of it, if you can. How dreadfully do they surpass all the occurrences which have often alarmed wicked men with an excruciating consciousness of their own demerit?

I WILL not enlarge on the convulsions of nature, and the appearances of terror, which will precede and introduce the day of the Lord; the *roarings of the sea* *; the *quakeings of the earth* †; the *blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke* ‡; the *signs and wonders in heaven* §;

* Luke, xxi. 25.

† Ver. 11.

‡ Joel, ii. 30.

§ Ver. 31. Luke, xxi. 11.

the stars falling down *; the moon turned into blood; and the sun into an orb of darkness †; all dreadfully announcing the approach of the Judge. These portents will dismay the wicked, overwhelm them with distress, distract them with perplexity ‡, melt their heart in the midst of them, and cause them to mourn and wail ||. But they will be perceived only by those who will be then alive. It is by the resurrection, that all the rest of the wicked shall be aroused to the tortures of self-reproach.

*An angel cometh down from heaven, and crieth with a loud voice, and soundeth the trump of God §. The grave, the earth, the sea, give up their dead ¶. The dead hear the voice of the Son of God, and live, and come forth **. That voice, that trump, which raises the dead, awakens the wicked to all the misgivings of conscious guilt, to the full view of all the horrors of their miserable state; it awakens them to fruitless remorse and racking despair. How can it fail? The guilty—it is the decree of God, the unchangeable law of human nature—are easily alarmed; they catch a consuming flame from every strange occurrence. The sons of Jacob*

* Mat. xxiv. 29. † Luke, xxi. 11. ‡ Ver. 25.

|| Mat. xxiv. 30. Rev. i. 7. § Rev. x. 1. 3. | Theff. iv. 16.

¶ Rev. xx. 13.

** John, v, 25. 29.

but felt some hardship, and apprehended some danger, in a distant country: and immediately their conscience reminded them of their ill-desert in selling Joseph *. Belshazzar had made a splendid feast, and was indulging himself amidst his lords, his wives, and his concubines, in all the pleasures of luxury, wine, and revelling; when *the fingers of a man's hand came forth, and wrote upon the wall*—he understood not what; but it conjured up terrors to his mind, in the very hour of dissipation and riot; *the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another* †. The very winds will sometimes seem to whisper their offences to the wicked. And will not that voice force them on their remembrance which soundeth louder than the thunder, from the one end of heaven to the other? that voice which they know to be the call to judgment? The signal for the coming of an earthly judge is terrifying to the criminal; how much more terrifying, to every conscious sinner, must that trumpet be, which announces the appearance of the universal Judge from heaven, and proclaims the great and last assize?—Awakened by that trumpet, to the torturing sense of

* Gen. xlii. 21, 22.

† Dan. v. 5, 6.

guilt—happy for them to have slept for ever ; —but awake they must,—the wicked come forth reluctant, ghastly, trembling. And to what a scene ? How changed from the present world ! In the present world, the objects of sense divert your thoughts from yourselves ; the bustle of business engrosses your attention ; gaieties and amusements dissipate your reflection ; inconsideration hides your real character from your eyes, the avocations of life turn off the anguish which your suspicions of it sometimes threaten. But at the resurrection, the phantoms have disappeared ; they find no place beyond the grave ; they have left you distracted for not having sooner discovered their destructive vanity. Even on earth, they could not always infatuate you into peace ; your own heart knows, that guilt has sometimes pierced it, like a sharp arrow, when there appeared no hand which let it fly ; and when, absorbed in worldly cares, or dissolved in the effusest mirth, you seemed to be secure from every wound : when then you rise naked from the grave, and can find no shield ; and when all things around you conspire in impressing you with your guilt, how certainly and how deeply shall it lacerate your souls ? To think, is to be miserable ; and not to think, is impossible. In the present world, when the sinner is roused from his thoughtlessness, and constrained

strained to reflect upon his ways, he can often elude the rebukes of conscience by the chicanery of self-deceit. He can persuade himself that his sins are small, and abate the severity of remorse; he can misrepresent his vices as innocent, and stifle the uneasy sense of them; he can confound them with virtue, and glory in what is in truth his shame. But the brightness of Christ's coming will reveal all the illusions of self-deceit. Every thing will appear as it really is. No fascination can hide or disguise a single crime. Every sin starts up in its genuine form; its baseness is written on it as with a sun-beam; no colouring can varnish over its deformity; no philm can obstruct the full perception of it. All the painted virtues of men, to their confusion, shew themselves real vices; their laborious religion is discovered to have been but abject superstition; their flaming zeal, but bigotry, bitterness, and cruelty; their prudence and frugality, avarice; their generosity, vanity, and profusion; their charity ostentation; their rigid justice, hard-heartedness and rancour. The past success of their self-imposition adds to the bitterness of their reflections. We befool ourselves whenever we attempt to disguise our vices from ourselves. It is to be willingly lulled into a false security, which must end in unexpected ruin. In the present world, by continuing

nuing to act in bold defiance to conscience, the wicked can stupify it, and stop its mouth from either inculcating their duty, or warning them of their danger. But the effrontery of the most daring and abandoned sinner will fail when he is called to judgment. Though he could dispute the commands of conscience, and despise its threatenings of punishment, he finds that when the season for punishment is come, it inflicts it with a power that is irresistible. Pierced by its stings, he writhes himself in torture, he is embowelled with agonies; they are entwisted with the essential principles of his frame.—The night is past; the darkness which concealed him from his own eyes is over and gone; gone with them, and gone for ever his rest and peace. He laments that ever he was at rest; he bewails that ever he enjoyed peace in sin. It has forfeited his everlasting peace. There is no longer a possibility of disregarding the things which were unseen, and deemed remote, perhaps uncertain. The cause of disregarding them has ceased. All other things have fled before the glories of the last day, like mist before the wind. These alone are present now; they are heard, and seen, and felt. The sinner was forewarned that he would be brought into judgment; he nevertheless indulged himself in what he knew could not endure the trial;

and he found means to evade the painful apprehension of his condemnation, which might have restrained him. But the severer pain which he now endures, by what means can he evade? The angel of the resurrection has, with the blast of his breath, *swept away all the refuges of lies* *. He might have known what has now befallen him! He could not avoid sometimes dreading it! He might have prevented it! But now it is inevitable! The reflection aggravates the tortures of remorse and terror, to whose united fury his sepulchre has cast him out. Neither heaven nor earth, neither eternity nor time, contains aught that can alleviate his pain. The past, the future, and the present conspire to inflame it. The past is a precious opportunity of obtaining eternal happiness, wilfully lost, and lost for ever. The future discloses only the certain prospect of punishment for having lost it. The present is full of agonizing reflections, and fearful apprehensions, and of objects calculated for driving them into his inmost soul. It is the state of retribution, not the state of trial, into which he has arisen. The appointed messenger has already proclaimed, *that there shall be time no longer* †: *he that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him*

* Isa. xxviii. 17.

† Rev. x. 6.

be filthy still *. He cannot indulge the faintest hope of retrieving his condition. In the moment of deep remorse for an atrocious sin, an awakened conscience, sometimes even in this life, represents it as unpardonable: then it will declare with irresistible persuasiveness, that every unforfeited sin is in truth unpardonable. How dreadful is the misery of guilt and despair united! If guilt may become the most unsufferable torment that can seize a man, even now when there is room for its being expiated, what will it be, when there is no more place for repentance? In vain would we attempt to express to the full the torture which vice has often inflicted on the guilty mind; the inward pain which drove Adam to hide himself from God; the consternation which shook Belshazzar at his idolatrous debauch; the anguish which tore the traitor Judas when he hanged himself; the wretchedness which wrung the wicked emperor when he defied all the gods and goddesses to make it greater. Much less can we put in words, that complicated agony which the wicked shall suffer at the last. It surpasses those greatest distresses incident to mortal man, more than they surpass the slightest ailment that draws a tear from a puny or fretful child. To see that

* Rev. xxii. 11.

the punishment of hell is to be instantly inflicted! to be confounded with its greatness! yet to feel it perfectly just! not to dare to call it too severe! not to be able to allege a reason why it should not be rigorously executed!—It is an agony without a name!

THE whole world is assembled. The sinner beholds thousands, like himself, pale, trembling, agitated by the same unutterable agonies. Can the sight make him forget himself, or ease the torment which arises from reflecting on himself? It must be but a slight distress, in which one can derive consolation from his having fellow-sufferers. The horrors of guilt admit no alleviation from companions in misery; they are heightened by the sight of them; it reverberates a man's reflections upon himself, and sharpens them. The sight of an accomplice, though he betrayed no symptoms of a troubled conscience; the conviction of another for a crime similar to their own, though they were in no danger of detection, has sometimes surprised the wicked into a recollection of misdeeds which they had long forgotten, and kindled a devouring fire within them. And can the presence of all the world of sinners, at the last day, fail to kindle a fire like hell, in every wicked man; when their agonies are impressed on every feature,

obvious in the quaking of every joint, intuitively seen, and when he knows that he and they together have *come forth to condemnation* ? He meets his associates in vice ; and is overwhelmed with additional confusion. He meets his seducers ; and his rage against them convulses him with a fresh torment. He meets those whom he has corrupted ; and their upbraidings harrow up his soul. The misery of every sinner is contagious as the pestilence. Every groan of a guilty heart, serves for fuel to feed the flames of all the rest.—But here likewise are all the generations of the righteous. They rise, as they fell asleep, intermingled with the wicked. But how splendidly distinguishable from them ? By the solemnities of this great day, they are fixt in awe ; but it is serene and pleasant ; they rejoice, they triumph, in confidence of the approbation of the Judge ; their serenity and their joy every moment grow and become more conspicuous ; by the emanations of their inward gladness, their very bodies are already glorified. All the tokens of their blessedness are like barbed arrows, tearing the hearts of the wicked. They *run to and fro, like sparks among the stubble*†, and lay waste their spirits within them. Even on earth, the good man,

* John, v. 29.

† Wisd. iii. 7.

though

though compassed with infirmities, depressed by poverty, despicable for his external meanness, reputed unhappy in comparison, is uneasy to the wicked; *he was made to reprove their thoughts; his deeds upbraid them with their offences; he is grievous unto them, even to behold* *. But when they shall see the whole company of congregated saints raised each in glory, and *standing in great boldness*, when they shall discern among them the man whose admonitions they slighted, whose practice they ridiculed, whose person they insulted; then *they shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the strangeness of his salvation: and groaning for anguish of spirit, they shall say within themselves, This was he whom we had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach: we fools accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honour: how is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints! We have wearied ourselves in the way of wickedness and destruction †! On all the inherent torments of guilt, these reflections accumulate the gnawings of unavailing and unrelenting spite and envy.—But all these are only the beginnings of sorrows ‡.*

THE Judge of the world appears, descending in awful majesty; *his glory covereth the*

* Wild. ii. 12—15.

† Chap. v. 1—7.

‡ Mark, xiii. 8.

heavens *. Angels, more numerous than the stars of the firmament, and more radiant than the sun, attend him at his coming. The breasts of the wicked are all tumult and distraction; horror chills their hearts, and shame is upon all their faces. The appearance of a single angel, with his glory veiled, sent on a message of kindness, has laid even good men prostrate on the earth, in bitter abomination of their vileness, and made them to tremble because they were unclean. And when the whole host of heaven, angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, shall appear together, shining in the fulness of their celestial splendour, and on purpose to minister to the final destruction of all the wicked, can it be but every sinner must be alarmed into tribulation, and anguish, and terror in the consciousness of his impurity and guilt? Before the face of the Son of God, when his glory was hid under *the form of a servant* †, and when he spake in the mildest accents, the ruffians who came up boldly to apprehend him, daunted in an instant, *went backward and fell to the ground* ‡: at his word, when he bore only *the likeness of men* †, a whole legion of devils trembled and *cried out*

* Habak. iii. 3.

† Phil. ii. 7.

‡ John, xviii. 6.

in apprehension, that he would *torment* them *before the time* *. When therefore he shall come to judgment,—how changed from him at whom the legion trembled! not now *in fashion as a man* †, not now eclipsed by mortal flesh; but, as he was from the beginning, *in the form of God* ‡, *the brightness of his glory* ||, shining, as befits the only-begotten of the Father, in all his natural and all his mediatorial glory; and not in his personal glory alone, but in all *the glory likewise of his Father* §, invested with all the majesty of God; and now *perhaps* to punish, but *certainly* to take *vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ* ¶ : When this majestic one, so tremendously arrayed, on sight of whom, less awfully displayed, even his beloved John *fell at his feet as dead* §§, shall appear to judge the world, how shall the wicked stand before him? They dare not stand: yet stand they must. Fear and dismay is upon them, *pangs have taken hold of them, as the pangs of a woman that travaileth* ¶¶. They run about howling for shelter; they hide themselves in the dens and caverns of the earth; they cry out *to the rocks and to the mountains,*

* Mat. viii. 29.

|| Heb. i. 3.

§§ Rev. i. 17.

† Phil. ii. 8.

§ Mat. xvi. 27.

¶¶ Isa. xxi. 3.

‡ Ver. 6.

¶ 2 Thess. i. 8.

fall

fall on us, and hide us from his face ; for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand ?* He abhors their ways ; and themselves feel them to be abominable. He is come to punish them ; and their own hearts condemn them to the punishment. The justice of God demands it : they cannot fabricate a plea against its being inflicted. The very goodness of God cuts them off from hope ; it dictated those laws which they have obstinately violated. They cannot pray, they cannot ask forgiveness ; their conscience thunders in their ears, that it is now impossible. They cannot bear to think of the misery which they have entailed upon themselves ; but they can think of nothing else ; it obtrudes itself upon them. Can the punishment which they dread, be heavier than the anguish which they endure already ! What need of a sentence to complete their woe ! They are loaded with greater wretchedness than they can bear ! But they shudder in expectation of more unsufferable wretchedness.

A great white throne † is erected. The Son of God sits down upon it. The noon-day light is lost in the celestial effulgence which surrounds him. He casts his eyes upon the wicked ; and

* Rev. vi. 15, 16, 17.

† Rev. xx. 11.

they are troubled. When Peter had fallen, *the Lord turned and looked upon him* *. It was a look full of compassion; yet it cut him to the heart; and he *went out, and wept bitterly* †. If a look of tenderness from Jesus, when a prisoner, stung Peter with so sharp contrition for a single sin, with what horror will his look of anger, from *the throne of his glory* ‡, when his face and his eyes shall be more dazzling than the meridian sun, overwhelm the wicked, in the unavailing recollection of transgressions numberless and atrocious? If the sorrow of repentance was so violent, what will be the sorrow of consternation and despair?—They are brought before the judgment-seat. They can make no defence. Should they plead any of those excuses with which they were wont to reconcile themselves to their sins, they would be turned into evidences and aggravations of their guilt. It stares them in the face. They accuse themselves; they witness against themselves. Remorse has often compelled men to publish their crimes, when without this they could never have been known; in the day of judgment remorse is stronger; and dissimulation would be in vain. The Judge cannot be deceived; nothing can be hid; the most per-

* Luke, xxii. 61.

† Ver. 62.

‡ Mat. xxv. 31.

verse silence, the hardiest denial could not prevent a single sin from being *proclaimed upon the house-tops* *. But with what anguish of spirit must they divulge their sins? To be forced to accuse a friend, especially in a capital case, is torture. What then must it be for a man to accuse and to give testimony against himself, in the most capital case, when everlasting destruction must be his sentence? The confession of a fault is never unaccompanied with some degree of shame; to have a confession extorted from himself, of a crime which, from consciousness of its baseness, he laboured to conceal, covers a person with confusion: the ignominy of a public confession is so great, as to be deemed an expiation of very injurious offences; the mortification which it occasions is almost worse than death; to avoid the shame of detection, men have sometimes rushed into enormous deeds which their very hearts abhorred. How then can we conceive the mortification, the confusion, the disgrace, which overpower and rack the sinner, when all his sins are dragged out of that darkness in which he hoped to bury them for ever; when his own conscience is constrained to disclose his most hidden wickedness, to reveal the guilt of all his thoughts, and words, and ac-

* Luke, xii. 3.

tions,

tions, before the whole world of reasonable beings, the assembly of all nations and ages, the numberless hosts of angels, the glorious Judge; when he is forced with his own mouth to pronounce them atrocious, inexcusable, and worthy of damnation?—The Judge *sets the wicked on his left hand* *. He rehearses their demerits. He *convinces them of all their ungodly deeds, and of all their hard speeches* †. He gives the tremendous sentence; *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels* ‡. It cometh from his gracious lips, who died to save them from destruction; it wounds the deeper. They feel its justice, and are struck with horror. Heaven and earth resound with the united acknowledgments of men and angels. *Thou art righteous, O Lord, because thou hast judged thus* ||.

THE dissolution of the world will accompany the judgment of mankind; and it will heighten the sorrows and the terrors of the wicked. The agonies of a person who awakes in the midst of flames, and must stand still till they devour him, the consternation of a person who perceives the earth opening beneath his feet, and howls, and sinks into its bowels, defy

* Mat. xxv. 33.

† Mat. xxv. 33.

‡ Jude, 15.

|| Rev. xvi. 5.

description ; but they bear no proportion to the convulsions of the wicked, when all nature shall be commixed in universal conflagration, the mountains consumed, the rocks melted down, the earth burnt up, the heavens tumbling, the stars, the moon, the sun, falling blazing from their orbits. A faint description of this catastrophe impresses astonishment ; what will the execution of it be ! The world on fire would be in itself a sight of terror ; but the wicked are involved in its destruction. It wrings them with a tormenting sense of the folly of their sins. A heavy loss, or a deep affliction is generally sufficient to open the eyes of the sinner to the unprofitableness of his vices. But now his all is lost : his affliction is complete. In that world were all the objects which tempted him to commit his sins, all the objects in which he sought his happiness, his only portion ; and now it is gone for ever. He has wearied himself for things which are not. The whole creation is converted into a weapon for avenging God upon his enemies. The bottomless pit is uncovered. Hell opens its mouth. *The angels gather out of the kingdom of God, all them that offend, and all them which do iniquity, and cast them into the furnace of fire**. The sense of

* Mat. xiii. 41, 42.

guilt remains. The torture of self-condemnation aggravates all their sufferings. The abyfs is full of *weeping, and wailing, and gnafhing of teeth* *.

WHAT madness is it to rush on all these complicated horrors? It is a madness chargeable on all who live in wickedness. They are the necessary consequences of wickedness. Consider them in time; and be persuaded to repent of all your fins. Ye giddy and ye thoughtless, attend to them, and learn to think seriously of your most important interests: if ye trifle away the season in which they may be secured, ye will be awakened to thoughtfulness, when it can avail only to discover and enhance your irreparable misery. Ponder then, ye hypocrites; they are your portion: cease to impose yourselves upon the world for other than you are; study to be really what you wish to appear: in the hour of judgment, your falsehood will be exposed, and the rottenness of your hearts shewn naked to the whole creation; whatever is not sincere and genuine will be a sting; your fair pretences and goodly professions will be your confusion. Think of them, ye abandoned, ye openly profane; harden not your hearts

* Matt. xxv. 30.

any longer in your profligacy; your bold contempt of obligation will be no defence, in the day of your account, against the lashes of your consciences for having violated it; your audacity in committing sin, will be changed into a stounding dread of the merited punishment of sin. If you have fortified yourselves in obduracy, by casting off the belief of revelation, the false courage which this intoxication has produced will fail in the morning of the resurrection: your boasted freedom and depth of thought will unmask itself, and stand forth a vicious prejudice armed with scourges to chastise you as its voluntary slaves: you will be forced to reproach yourselves for having disobeyed the gospel which you disbelieved, because God gave you the opportunity of believing it: and you will discover that even its falshood could not vindicate you, because the principles of your own reason, and the dictates of your own conscience, inculcate the very virtues which it requires. If you have renounced the principles of reason, persuaded yourselves that there is no God nor future state, and debauched yourselves from the very sense of good and evil; yet your infidelity will vanish in the grave; the resurrection will convince you, to your unutterable anguish, that you are not beasts which perish; you shall find that to baffle the suggestions of your moral na-

ture, is not to subvert its constitution : conscience will re-assume its power ; reason will re-assert its rights ; you shall see the face of that God whom you denied, and sink beneath his terrors in that state of retribution which you derided. Ye who believe the gospel, but obey it not ; ye who pervert it from its real intention, and turn its grace into licentiousness ; ye who abuse its promises to cherish the hope of happiness on any terms consistent with wilful sin ; be assured that its purity will render you without excuse in the day of wrath, and force your own mouth to condemn you : if you forsake not your sins, the religious professions which you now regard as an impenetrable shield, will fly from your grasp, and leave you defenceless against the wounds of guilt. Ye who are blind to your own character, and keep yourselves easy in your sins by the artifices of self-deceit, open your eyes in time, behold yourselves as you truly are, and be reformed : when it is too late, your eyes will certainly be opened, and no disguise, no varnish will be able to hide from them the blackness of your hearts, and the vileness of your practices. Consider, sinners, and tremble, and be troubled, that by ceasing to be sinners, ye may have rest in the final day of tribulation.

IF you can withstand incitements to repentance, so alarming, you must even sleep on in sin, and take your rest on the brink of destruction. Yet your *judgment lingereth not*, your self-condemnation *slumbereth not* *. Be persuaded to prevent it speedily. Under a deep sense of the dreadful issue of iniquity, let us call ourselves to a strict account, and diligently search out our most secret sins. For every sin with which your conscience charges you, condemn yourselves honestly and impartially. Excuse none of your sins; extenuate none of them; represent them all to yourselves in their whole enormity. Shrink not from the remorse which the view of them produces; however severe, it is a wholesome pain: pursue it to repentance; rear it into a vehement and habitual abhorrence of evil. Actuated by this principle, guard carefully against every sin; abstain from whatever you must disapprove upon reflection; allow not yourselves in any thing which you but suspect that you will afterwards wish undone. Let conscience, informed by that *gospel according to which you shall be judged* †, be your guide in every part of your conduct: for what you do by its direction, you shall never need to condemn yourselves. As long as you find any thing in you which your hearts condemn, you remain imperfect: la-

* 2 Pet. ii. 3.

† Rom. ii. 16.

hour to become more perfect. Every day amend some fault in your temper, or some error in your practice. Wear off by degrees your most natural infirmities; reckon every defect in your virtue a real vice. Leave nothing for which your hearts can reproach you; if for any thing they now reproach you, and you forsake it not, they will reproach you more grievously at the last day. Decline not the labours of reformation and improvement: they alone can preserve you from the agonies of self-condemnation, and from the wrath of God; and amidst all the solemnities of the judgment, all the convulsions of nature, and all the terrors of the wicked, they will give the righteous peace, confidence, and joy, and fix them in the mansions of everlasting happiness. *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his* *. Amen.

* Num. xiii. 10.

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S E R M O N XI.

IN FOUR PARTS.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE PASTORAL OFFICE ON THE CHARACTER.

Preached before

THE SYNOD OF ABERDEEN,

At ABERDEEN, April 8, 1760, and published at their Desire.

TITUS i. 7. *first Clause.*

*A Bishop must be blameless, as the steward of
God.—*

PART I.

IN forming general conclusions from particular instances, especially when our experience of these instances has not been uniform, great caution is necessary, on every subject, to preserve us from mistakes. But a peculiar degree of caution is necessary in forming general maxims concerning *characters*; because the circumstances on which characters depend, are both more complicated, and more uncertain in their operation, than the causes of

natural effects. On this account, observations must be made on a very great number of individuals, before we can judge with accuracy concerning the character of the nation or the profession to which these individuals belong; and even after we have made the most extensive observations, we ought still to remember, that the maxim, which we form, far from being an universal truth, will necessarily be liable to numberless exceptions.

It is however undeniable, that there are few subjects on which men judge, either more rashly, or more dogmatically, than on the characters both of nations and of particular professions. They impute the faults which they have observed in a few individuals, to a whole nation or order. They often also embrace the groundless prejudice so closely, that, when they afterwards discover many other individuals, who appear to be free from the blemish which they had expected to find in them, they suppose them to be tainted with it notwithstanding, and take it for granted that it would become obvious in proper circumstances.

IN no instance has this shameful prejudice been indulged more freely, than in forming a disadvantageous idea of the clergy in general,
on

on account of the vices of some who have been members of that society. And, because ministers are the public teachers of christianity, the vices imputed to them in a body, without evidence, have been considered as throwing a reflection on the truth or the efficacy of the religion which it is their business to publish. The charge has been commonly enforced by loose and popular declamation, fit to make an impression on the imagination of the thoughtless, and, by consequence, to gain their passions to the party; but absolutely insufficient to convince the impartial and inquisitive. If there be any difficulty in confuting the accusations that are commonly brought against our order, and against the gospel on our account, it arises, not from the strength of the arguments by which they are supported, but from the total want of argument.

THE most natural and direct method of proving, that the clergy deserve the disagreeable character which is sometimes ascribed to them, would doubtless be, to examine the temper and conduct of the several individuals, and to shew, from an intimate knowledge of them, that the majority are really guilty of the vices imputed to the order. A candid enquirer would likewise choose, before he pronounced sentence concerning their character

on the whole, to compare them with the individuals of other professions, and to see what proportion the virtues and the vices of the *clergy* bear to those of the *laity*. It will scarcely be pretended, that this species of proof has been attempted by those who are so liberal in their declamations against the vices of the ministers of the gospel.—But though they could produce this proof in its greatest strength, it would still be difficult to shew, that the faults of ministers can be justly charged on the Christian religion, to the rules of which, it is manifest, these faults are absolutely contrary. The moral tendency of the doctrines of the gospel, and the purity and sublimity of its precepts, ought always to preserve it free from blame, on account of the vices of any who profess to believe it. Before these vices be imputed to the gospel, it should certainly be shown, that there is some doctrine, or precept, or example, recommended in Scripture, which gives countenance to them.

BUT though the method of proof which we have mentioned, be the most natural and direct, upon a subject of this kind, it must be acknowledged that another species of reasoning may be likewise used. All arguments concerning matter of fact are ultimately founded on experience; but it is not necessary to have recourse

recourse in every argument to experience of instances precisely similar to that which we infer. It is often sufficient, that the present argument be supported by some general maxims, which are clearly deducible from experience. We may conclude that a man who is intrusted with absolute power, will probably abuse it, not only from instances of tyrants who have abused it, but also from the more general observation of examples which occur of corruption and insolence in private life. In like manner could it be fairly proved, that there are circumstances essential to the ministerial office, which, according to our general observation of human nature, have a direct and primary tendency to produce certain vices in those who exercise that office; and should it be inferred from this, that these vices will be characteristical of the order, and that the religion which institutes the office, is the occasion of them; we could not justly refuse to admit the inference. This method of proof has been attempted by a late author, in an *Essay on national Characters* *. Declining the direct proof

* THE character, which he draws, is this; 'Tis a trite, but not altogether a false maxim, *that Priests of all religions are the same*; and though the character of the profession will not, in every instance, prevail over the personal character, yet it is sure always to predominate with the greater number. For as chymists

proof of the vices commonly imputed to the clergy, from immediate experience, he has drawn

mists observe, that spirits, when raised to a certain height, are all the same, from whatever materials they be extracted; so these men, being elevated above humanity, acquire a uniform character, which is entirely their own, and which, in my opinion, is, generally speaking, not the most amiable that is to be met with in human society. It is, in most points, opposite to that of a soldier; as is the way of life, from which it is derived.

THOUGH all mankind have a strong propensity to religion at certain times and in certain dispositions; yet are there few or none, who have it to that degree, and with that constancy, which is requisite to support the character of this profession. It must, therefore, happen, that clergymen, being drawn from the common mass of mankind, as people are to other employments, by the views of profit, the greatest part, though no atheists or freethinkers, will find it necessary, on particular occasions, to feign more devotion than they are, at that time, possessed of, and to maintain the appearance of fervour and seriousness, even when jaded with the exercises of their religion, or when they have their minds engaged in the common occupations of life. They must not, like the rest of the world, give scope to their natural movements and sentiments: they must set a guard over their looks and words and actions; and in order to support the veneration paid them by the ignorant vulgar, they must not only keep a remarkable reserve, but must promote the spirit of superstition, by a continued grimace and hypocrisy. This dissimulation often destroys the candour and ingenuity of their tempers, and makes an irreparable breach in their characters.

If by chance any of them be possessed of a temper more susceptible of devotion than usual, so that he has but *little* occasion for hypocrisy to support the character of his profession; it is so natural for him to over-rate this advantage, and to think

drawn a character for them (though he admits of many exceptions in individuals), which is by
no

it atones for every violation of morality, that frequently he is not more virtuous than the hypocrite. And though few dare openly avow these exploded opinions, "that every thing is lawful to the saints, and that they alone have a property in their goods;" yet may we observe, that these principles lurk in every bosom, and represent a zeal for religious observances as so great a merit, that it may compensate for many vices and enormities. This observation is so common, that all prudent men are on their guard, when they meet with any extraordinary appearance of religion; though at the same time they confess, that there are many exceptions to this general rule, and that probity and superstition are far from being incompatible.

MOST men are ambitious; but the ambition of other men may commonly be satisfied, by excelling in their particular profession, and thereby promoting the interests of society. The ambition of the clergy can often be satisfied only by promoting ignorance and superstition, and implicit faith and pious frauds. And having got what Archimedes only wanted (*viz.* another world, on which he could fix his engines), no wonder they move this world at their pleasure.

MOST men have an over-weening conceit of themselves, but these have a peculiar temptation to that vice, who are regarded with such veneration, and are even deemed sacred, by the ignorant multitude.

MOST men are apt to bear a particular regard for the members of their own profession; but as a lawyer, a physician, or merchant does, each of them, follow out his business apart, the interests of these professions are not so closely united as the interests of clergymen of the same religion; where the whole body gains by the veneration paid to the ir common tenets, and by the suppression of antagonists.

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no means amiable, a character which includes many of the blackest vices in human nature ;
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Few men can bear contradiction with patience ; but the clergy too often proceed even to a degree of fury on this article ; because all their credit and livelihood depend upon the belief which their opinions meet with ; and they alone pretend to a divine and supernatural authority, or have any colour for representing their antagonists as impious and profane. The Odium Theologicum, or theological hatred, is noted even to a proverb, and means that degree of rancour which is the most furious and implacable.

THUS many of the vices of human nature are, by fixt moral causes, inflamed in that profession ; and though several individuals escape the contagion, yet all wise governments will be on their guard against the attempts of a society, who will for ever combine into one faction, and while it acts as a society, will for ever be actuated by ambition, pride, and a persecuting spirit.

THE temper of religion is grave and serious ; and this is the character required of priests, which confines them to strict rules of decency, and commonly prevents irregularity and intemperance amongst them. The gaiety, much less the excesses of pleasure, is not permitted in that body ; and this virtue is, perhaps, the only one they owe to their profession. In religions, indeed, founded on speculative principles, and where public discourses make a part of religious service, it may also be supposed that the clergy will have a considerable share in the learning of the times ; though it is certain, that their taste in eloquence will always be better than their skill in reasoning and philosophy. But whoever possesses the other noble virtues of humanity, meekness, and moderation, as very many of them, no doubt, do, is beholden for them to nature or reflection, not to the genius of his calling. HUME's *Essays Moral and Political*, Essay 24.

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and he has endeavoured to prove, that this character naturally results from the very genius of the ministerial calling.

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THIS is a representation chiefly of the MORAL character of the clergy; and to that the following discourse is wholly confined. But as an insinuation is likewise made to the disadvantage of their INTELLECTUAL character, it will be proper to remark, that this insinuation is, both of little weight, and, in a great measure, without foundation.—It is of little weight; for taste is more general among all men, than skill in philosophy. A greater number can judge of beauty, than of truth. Many are moved by the eloquence of a discourse, who cannot examine the justness of the reasoning. We meet much oftener with a degree of imagination, and sensibility of temper, sufficient to form a good speaker, than with the penetration which is necessary for investigating the causes of things, and inventing just theories. It can be no reflection on the clergy, that taste is more universal, than philosophical genius, in their profession, as well as in all other professions. Their taste will naturally be better in eloquence, than in other arts, because their office leads them to apply especially to that.—In every sense, in which it can be considered as a reflection on our order, the insinuation is entirely groundless. Were mankind persuaded that we are unacquainted with the rules of just reasoning, and only qualified for popular declamation on principles taken for granted without enquiry; this might perhaps incline them to listen to those who tell them, that the truths of religion, which we teach, are mere fables, destitute of evidence, though we be not possessed of a degree of reason sufficient for detecting the fallacious arguments produced in support of them; it might prepare them for expecting wonderful discoveries in the writings of infidels, and prejudice them against our vindications of religion. I will not say, that this author made the insinuation with a design to promote this end, because he has not informed us what is his design. But I will say, this end can be really promoted by nothing less, than a proof that the clergy are weak reasoners, in comparison

THAT candour, which the gospel recommends, and which ought always to prevail in the heart of a minister of the gospel, forbids me to attempt detracting from the real merit or abilities of this author. He is possessed of a very considerable share of genius and penetra-

parison with the rest of mankind; and I will venture to affirm, that neither the nature of their employment, nor experience of their real character, gives reason for representing them in this light. Their profession turns their attention to eloquence, but does not divert it from just reasoning. Their public functions lead them to employ all their powers of persuasion, in inculcating truth and goodness on their hearers; their studies lead them also to examine most questions of importance, to enquire into the abstrusest truths, and to detect the most subtle errors. Corruptions of religion, interwoven with the tenets of a false philosophy, have sometimes retarded the improvement of science; but it is the business of ministers to teach only pure religion; it is a perversion of their office to support corruptions of religion, and the effects of this perversion cannot justly be imputed to the genuine spirit of the office. In fact, the clergy have never been remarkably defective in the knowledge of philosophy. There have been periods, in which the philosophy of the times was almost wholly confined to them. When the scholastic philosophy prevailed universally, they discovered as great subtlety, as men of other professions. As great a proportion of the clergy, as of any other class, have excelled in the knowledge, both of nature, and of the human mind. It is natural for freethinkers to reckon the reasonings of the clergy, concerning religion, weak and inconclusive, because they are contradictory to their own; but we are not afraid to desire the world to compare the writings of men of our order, with those of the most admired infidels, in respect either of the truth of the principles, from which they argue, or of the strength and closeness of the arguments.

tion. This will gain him attention from the inquisitive; and will render his reasonings on every subject more specious than those of many others, and on that account more dangerous, when, at any time, he happens to mistake. Is it not, then, worth while, my reverend fathers and brethren, to enquire whether his charge be just? Will it be unsuitable to the present occasion, to examine fairly and impartially, what is the natural influence of the ministerial office upon the characters of those who exercise it?

THE ungainly potrait that has been drawn for the ministers of the gospel, suggested this investigation to my thoughts. When I found myself obliged, by the authority of my superiors, to appear in this place, on the present occasion, I willingly chose this subject. It affords me an opportunity of considering the ministerial character and office, in a point of view in which they have not been frequently regarded. It frees me from the necessity of even *seeming* to give directions to those, from whom it becomes me rather to receive instruction; for the very nature of the design confines me to enquiry. At the same time it will appear, that the enquiry is far from being merely speculative, or unimproving, and that it has, on the contrary, the most intimate connexion with

with practice. I enter on it, with a sincere desire to vindicate our sacred function from reproach; and will conduct it with an eye especially to that author to whom I have referred already. Priests, of the temper which he describes, would unite in the bitterest invectives against an antagonist who has attacked the whole body of the clergy, in a manner so unreserved. But that is not the temper of the ministers of Jesus Christ. I know well, that my reverend hearers would not excuse me, if I made the least approach to rancour, or unbecoming warmth against him, if I opposed him in any other spirit than *the spirit of meekness* *, or if I considered my subject in any other manner, than with that impartiality which will be observed by those who seek only to discover truth.

THE Apostle Paul says in my text, *A bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God*. It will be evident that these words lead naturally to the proposed enquiry, if we attend to the manner in which they are introduced, especially if we consider, at the same time, the import of the words themselves in the original. The Apostle reminds *Titus*, ver. 5. that he had left him in *Crete* for this purpose, that he

* Gal. vi. 1.

might ordain elders or presbyters in every city; men blameless, free not only from gross and scandalous wickedness, but from every species of vice; for the word here used has a respect to the judgment of God, and not merely to the sentiments of men *. In my text he shews that, when he required presbyters to be blameless, he enjoined only what the very nature of their office demands. A presbyter is, by his office, *a bishop*, that is, *an overseer*; and, according to the language of the New Testament, as appears from the only place where the term is used in such a way, that its meaning can be precisely determined †, *an overseer of all the flock, of the church of God*. On this account, he *must be blameless*: steady and universal virtue, as far as it can be attained by human nature, is a qualification absolutely necessary for the exercise of his office. To render the necessity of this character still more evident, the Apostle adds, *as the steward of God*. He represents the Christian church as the family of God, and informs us, that ministers are appointed to dispense, to the several members of it, that spiritual food by which they may be nourished to eternal life. As he elsewhere characterises them more explicitly, they are *stewards of the mysteries of God* ‡, teachers, not of their own

* See 1 Cor. i. 22. Col. i. 22.

† Acts, xx. 28.

‡ 1 Cor. iv. 1.

opinions, but of the doctrines of the Christian revelation. The import of the text is, therefore, plainly this; 'the most exalted and blameless virtue is requisite, from the very nature of their office, in those whose business it is to teach religion, and to oversee the morals of the people.' Does not this assertion of the Apostle imply, that the ministerial office has a tendency upon the whole to form a good and virtuous character? Could his maxim be true, if that very office had an unalterable tendency to inflame many of the basest vices of human nature, and to produce a character which every good man must regard with indignation? May not we, then, with sufficient propriety, take occasion from this text to enquire, what is that temper which our employment, as ministers of the gospel, tends to cultivate in our souls?

IN prosecuting this subject, I will, FIRST, enquire how far a tendency in the ministerial office, to form a character in some respects disagreeable, or even a character exposed to the danger of becoming vicious, could reasonably affect either the credit of that office, or the excellence of the Christian religion, in which the office is founded.

SECONDLY,

SECONDLY, I will enquire, whether that character, which the ministerial office tends to form, be virtuous or vicious on the whole.

THIRDLY, I will enquire, how far this office has really a tendency to produce, or to inflame those particular vices which some have represented as characteristical of our order.

FIRST, I will enquire, how far a tendency in the ministerial office, to form a character in some respects disagreeable, or a character exposed to the danger of becoming vicious, could reasonably affect either the credit of that office, or the excellence of the Christian religion.

It is not unusual to draw from an argument, a conclusion totally different from that which it really proves; and, by means of the ambiguity of words, or the confusion of men's ideas, the fallacy often escapes detection, and it is taken for granted that a proposition is proved, for which, in fact, there has not been a single argument proposed. Attempts have been sometimes made to shew that the occupation of ministers tends to prevent their acquiring that artificial polish, which adds gracefulness to the behaviour of the higher ranks of

mankind: and when plausible evidence for this trivial charge has been produced, men have triumphed, as if they had demonstrated a very different proposition, that the character of our profession is positively disagreeable, contemptible, or ridiculous. In like manner, when men have produced such arguments as seem to make it probable, that the turn of character and manners, which is promoted by the genius of the ministerial office, will be unfit to engage the *liking* of the generality, or will be *disagreeable* in some situations, they have taken it for granted, that these arguments prove with equal force, that this turn of character and manners is likewise positively *vicious*, and unfit to gain the inward *esteem*, or the moral *approbation* of men.

A MODERATE degree of understanding might preserve a person from being deceived by sophisms so palpable. But persons of good understanding are often not so ready to exert a very small degree of reflection, as to receive every thing, without examination, which can gratify their own pride, or afford them mirth, by representing others as proper objects of contempt or ridicule. For this reason, these arguments, or others equally inconclusive, have in fact occasioned a great part of the contempt, which has been poured out upon the clergy.

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It will not, therefore, be unnecessary to remark, though the remark be extremely obvious, that a character not only may be agreeable, when many agreeable qualities are wanting in it, because the mere absence of them gives no positive disgust; but also may be really disagreeable, or unfit to engage a general liking, and yet be so far from vicious, that it shall, on the contrary, command the moral approbation, and force the good opinion, and even the veneration of mankind.

As characters and actions may be considered in various lights, they may gratify a spectator, by sentiments totally distinct and different. These sentiments are very apt to be confounded, because they are all agreeable; but every man who desires to think with accuracy, must be at pains to preserve them separate. A *liking* to a character is very different from the *approbation* or *esteem* of it. The former sentiment is excited chiefly by the more trivial accomplishments of the man; the latter, only by such as are important. The qualities, which most effectually engage the liking of the generality, are of too low an order to be regarded as being even a-kin to the moral virtues: nay, there are some *vices*, which, because they diffuse a certain ease, and gaiety, and sprightliness over the temper and behaviour, are very apt

to obtain the liking even of those, in whom a moment of reflexion produces abhorrence of their baseness. But it is only solid virtue, rooted deep in the temper, and exerted regularly in the conduct, that can either gain or preserve the real inward approbation and esteem of mankind. It likewise deserves to be remarked, that a man's own turn of character has great influence in determining the objects of his liking, who will be those chiefly whose manners resemble his own; and therefore this sentiment will be variable and precarious. Approbation is more permanent and universal, and less dependent on the peculiarities of temper; it is often bestowed unwillingly by men, on those to whom their own consciences tell them, to their anguish, that themselves bear no similitude.

SUPPOSE now, my fathers and brethren, that some person should assert, in writing or in conversation, that our office deprives us of opportunities for acquiring that exterior polish of manners, which is very acceptable to the generality, and indeed graceful in itself. This is really the whole amount of some of those superficial reflexions which are often thrown out against us. The author whom we have principally in our eye, does not expressly urge this insignificant accusation; yet he seems to insinuate,

nuate, not only that we are obnoxious to it, but also that it doth detract from the credit of our office; for he mentions good breeding and openness of behaviour, as one of the amiable qualities which enter into the character of a soldier, and are naturally derived from his way of life; and he tells us, that the character of a clergyman, as well as his way of life, is, in most points, opposite to that of a soldier.—Need we be much concerned to enquire, whether the charge be true or false? If we should acknowledge it, do you think that either the importance of our office, or the excellence of our religion, would suffer by the acknowledgment? Nay, might not the ministerial character be, nevertheless, agreeable, and fit to procure even the liking of the generality? For might not it contain those amiable inward qualities, of which external politeness is only either the expression or the mimicry, and from which openness and ease of behaviour deriveth all its merit?

SUPPOSE again, that it should be asserted, that the character which naturally results from our office, is very generally *disagreeable*; must we take it for granted immediately, that this character is *vicious*? May not we reasonably ask, before we admit this conclusion, to whom, and in what particular manner, it is disagreeable?

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It is asserted by others, and it is not dissembled by ourselves, that our office tends to form us to a grave and serious temper, that it discourages the gaiety of pleasure and unthinking levity of behaviour, that it confines us to strict rules of decency, that it leads us to set a guard over our looks, and words, and actions, and restrains us from giving scope to our natural movements and sentiments, whenever they are either sinful or unbecoming.—I do not know but there are some particular seasons in which the generality would dislike a man of this character, and shun his company. But it would be only when they were disposed to exceed the limits of right and innocence. And could it be inferred, from his being disagreeable to them in this situation, that his character is vicious, or even that they who dislike him, do not really approve and esteem him notwithstanding? I doubt not but a person of the character, which we have described, will be, in all situations, disagreeable to many. He bears no resemblance, in his manners, to the gay, the dissipated, and the voluptuous; and his presence would lay them under an uneasy restraint. They will always *dislike* him: but is it certain, that even they will always *disapprove* him? Or if they should, would it be of mighty consequence? For could he be more agreeable to them, without becoming less virtuous? Admit, then,

then, that our office naturally produces a turn of character which is disagreeable in some respects; will either the credit of that office, or the excellence of our religion, suffer by this charge, if we be able to vindicate our calling from a temper, that is really vicious, or morally evil?

FARTHER, brethren, is it absolutely certain, that every tendency in the ministerial function, to produce some real vices in those who exercise it, will necessarily detract from its credit, or be inconsistent with the perfect purity of the gospel? An assertion or insinuation of this nature is plausible indeed: yet it may be proved, that it ought not to be admitted but under several limitations.—Were it the direct and primary tendency of our profession, to form a vicious character, or to inflame some heinous vices, this would certainly reflect dishonour on it. This would render ours an unlawful calling, because we could not exercise it, without doing what is wrong. Were there, for instance, any essential part of our office which we could not execute, without imposing *cunningly devised fables** on the credulity of mankind, or fostering a spirit of superstition among them, or offering violence

* 2 Pet. i. 16.

to their consciences, our employment would be so far absolutely immoral. This would also reflect dishonour on our religion; for that religion could not be true, or holy, or divine, which it were impossible to teach without committing sin. Let it be clearly proved, that something unlawful must *necessarily* be practised in teaching the doctrines, or inculcating the duties of genuine, *uncorrupted christianity*:—by this, indeed, but by nothing less than this, our office and our religion will be exposed to censure.

If any person should discover that, though our office tend *primarily* to form and improve a virtuous character, it has a remote and *secondary* tendency to produce vicious dispositions in those who resist its original impulse; we may give him liberty to avail himself of the discovery as much as he can with reason. The amount of the discovery is only this, that the best things may be abused, that what is naturally calculated for the worthiest purpose may be perverted, and, after it is perverted, rendered subservient to an unworthy and contrary end. This is, indeed, an universal truth. Reason is a noble faculty, implanted in our nature, on purpose to enable us to distinguish truth from falsehood: but a superior degree of reason has been often employed to disguise plain truths, and
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to render errors plausible. Natural affection is an amiable instinct, designed to prompt the parent, to provide for the helpless infant, and to submit to all the fatigues which may be necessary for instilling knowledge and virtue into the opening mind : yet it frequently degenerates into a vicious fondness, which occasions the death, or prevents the education of the child. The primary end of ingenuous shame and regard to reputation plainly is the prevention of infamous vices : but does not this very principle often lead men to commit one act of wickedness in order to conceal another which they have already perpetrated in secret ? In a word, nothing can have so strong a tendency to promote a good end, but it may be perverted to serve a bad, or even a contrary purpose. Are we then to judge of things by their primary and essential tendency, or by that accidental direction which they acquire when they have been abused ? By the former, certainly. If it is not sufficient that the primary tendency of a thing be good, if it is necessary likewise, that it be incapable of perversion or abuse ; there will be nothing good or wise in art or nature ; there will be no situation or employment in the world safe or lawful, for there is none from which men may not take occasion to fall into vicious conduct. And is it fair or reasonable to insist, that more is requisite for the vindication of the pastoral office

vice than of any thing besides? Are those vices to be charged on the office, which spring only from the abuse of it? Are they not rather to be imputed solely to the faults of individuals?

WHEN therefore any person asserts, that there are circumstances in the pastoral office which tend to inflame any particular vice, it is incumbent on him to distinguish carefully between the primary and the accidental tendency of these circumstances. If the tendency be but accidental, to urge it to the disadvantage of the office, is, either inadvertently or artfully, to confound things totally distinct, and thus to render a falsehood plausible, or to give a harmless truth an unfavourable aspect: it is like hurting a man's reputation by an insinuation which will very probably be misunderstood, and which could do no hurt except it were misunderstood.

It has been said, that there are certain vices of which ministers are often guilty, and into which they are led by their profession. Suppose it were alleged, as an instance of this, that when ministers are conscious of their wanting some virtue which the decorum of their character requires, they are apt to affect the outward appearance of that virtue. Such

Such ministers are, no doubt, guilty of hypocrisy. It may be affirmed too, in some sense, that their profession is the occasion of this hypocrisy; because their being conscious that their profession requires the virtue which they affect, is their motive in making false pretences to it. But is it not plain that in this case, the spirit of the office leads them *naturally*, not to *affect* the virtue, but really to *cultivate* it? It can be said to lead to hypocrisy, only by *accident*, by being perverted from its original and proper aim; and its being thus perverted, far from implying that it has an immoral tendency, sets the strength of its tendency to virtue in the clearest light; for it shows, that the ministerial office prompts men so powerfully to the culture of virtue, that even they who resist its impulse, and over whom it has the least power, must palliate their want of real virtue, to themselves and others, by an hypocritical show of goodness.

THERE are some vices, which bear a general resemblance to certain virtues: superstition, for instance, mimics piety; rancour calls itself zeal; moroseness would pass for a serious temper. Men of all professions often indulge the vice, while they flatter themselves that they are cultivating the virtue for which it is mistaken. We impute it to their weakness,

ness, and pity their want of true moral discernment. Suppose that a clergyman should in like manner substitute some specious vice in the place of a particular virtue which eminently suits the genius of his profession: ought we to impute this vice to the profession? Must not we, on the contrary, impute it wholly to the infirmity of the individual, and to the general deceitfulness of sin? If this can account for similar instances among other ranks of men, with what colour of reason can we urge the vice, as a proof of an immoral tendency in the ministerial calling?

THERE are certain ends naturally desirable to mankind, in whatever station they be placed. Every station furnishes a man with *lawful* means of promoting these ends; but in every station, a man has it likewise in his power to pursue them by *unlawful* means.— Besides those ends, which we may *innocently* aim at, there are others, which it is *wrong* to pursue, but which the corrupt affections of mankind will often lead them to pursue; and different wrong ends will be most likely to attract different classes of men.—In the present degenerate state of mankind, many will pursue unlawful ends, or seek to promote such ends as are lawful in themselves, by unjustifiable means. They have the vicious bent

bent which occasions this, independent of their particular profession; but it determines the form which the vice assumes. It is in this way that every station and profession has its peculiar temptations, and exposes those who occupy it to peculiar dangers.—Now suppose that the station in which ministers are placed, has, in like manner, its peculiar temptations; that ministers may find in their employment unlawful means of attaining a lawful end, or that they may render their sacred functions subservient to a wrong end: is this any more than happens in other professions? If this can expose the ministry to censure, must it not equally expose every other occupation? Can it, then, be fairly urged to the disadvantage of this one office, in comparison with others? If this tendency to vice be but secondary and accidental in other callings, must it not be esteemed such also in our vocation? If, in other employments, the fault be chargeable only on the individuals who are guilty, pray, why should not individual clergymen likewise be alone answerable for yielding to the temptations, which arise from their peculiar business?—The office of a clergyman is founded in the gospel: but can the gospel be blamed, because this office has its peculiar temptations? Before you determine that it can, stop for a moment, and observe
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the consequences. Other stations are appointed in the course of ordinary providence; and their peculiar temptations would reflect the same dishonour upon it. If the common temptations of life be not sufficient to overturn the belief of a God and a providence, those which are peculiar to the pastoral office, cannot affect the truth or the excellence of the gospel. Let none therefore throw blame on the Christian ministry, on account of its supplying some temptations to vice, or on the gospel, because it has established an office, which is liable to abuse, but those who have already embraced atheism, and denied the constitution of the world to be wise and good.

—Mankind are at present, by the universal appointment of God, in a state of trial and exercise. There is no circumstance in life, but gives us opportunities of acting either virtuously or viciously. It is only by putting it in our power to act viciously if we choose, that any situation can exercise or improve our virtuous affections. Exercise is afforded to our temper, not only by the general circumstances of life, common to all men, but likewise by the peculiar circumstances of particular professions. There are peculiar circumstances in the ministerial office, as well as in every other, which may give exercise to our virtues, and improve them, but may likewise,

as is indeed a necessary consequence, prove occasions of vice. To assert this, is only to say, that ministers of the gospel are in a state of probation and discipline, in the same sense as other men; that their employment, as well as other employments, contains circumstances fit to draw out virtuous principles, and to give them exercise; and this surely can derogate nothing from the excellence of their office.

BUT suppose that the vices of a wicked minister rise higher, in particular instances, and become more atrocious than those of others: this is so far from *necessarily* implying an immoral tendency in his office, that, on the contrary, it *may* really proceed from the strength of its virtuous tendency; for the greater the advantages which this office affords for virtuous practice, the greater will be the depravity necessary for abusing them, and the more heinous and inveterate the corruption which will spring from the abuse.—

As the same vicious principle may assume different forms, and be exerted in different ways, some forms and exertions of it are often more detestable and pernicious than others. If, then, some vicious principle should assume its blackest form, in the practice of a clergyman who fosters it; and if it should appear to be

determined to that form by the circumstances of his occupation ; can we arraign the spirit of his office on this account ? This were to judge of that office only by the abuse of it. But do not all men admit it for a maxim, that those things are generally the best in themselves, the corruption of which is the worst ?

SUPPOSE again, that the employment of a minister contains circumstances which will lead to vicious conduct, if the greatest caution be not exercised : this would not necessarily prove even that vice will be more common among ministers than among other ranks of men ; much less would it prove, that the spirit of the office is, on the whole, friendly to vice ; for it may contain other circumstances which prompt strongly to exert the necessary caution, to resist the importunities of vice, and to cultivate every virtue. The ministerial office may, from its being abused and perverted by the weakness or corruption of those who exercise it, or from various circumstances in this state of probation in which it is to be executed, supply temptations which have a direct and powerful tendency to excite a passion or inclination, the indulgence of which will lead the negligent into vicious conduct. If this could throw a reflection on the spirit of that office, or on the Christian religion which
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has instituted it, how could we vindicate the ordinary situations in which God places us, or the general plan of his providence towards us in the present world? Many objects in nature excite passions which crave gratification often when it is vicious to gratify them. Were man formed for following thoughtlessly the present inclination, these objects would infallibly lead him into vice. But we must take the whole of human nature into the account; man is endued with a moral principle, a principle of reflection, whose proper business it is, to restrain inclination whenever it cannot be indulged lawfully. His state is suited to his whole nature. The temptations of life are designed to give him opportunities of exerting reflection, of acting with moral attention to his conduct, and are fit to strengthen, by this means, the principle of reflection, and improve a habit of self-government, which is the great security of virtue. They who will not exercise reflection and employ care, in controuling their inclinations, fall before temptations through their own fault, are hardened in vice by means of them, and thus render them subservient to a contrary end from that which God has designed and fitted them to answer. This is the general constitution of the world, yet the Creator is wise, and good, and perfect. The office of a Christian minis-

ter, in like manner, supplies temptations, with which many comply, and which it requires a great degree of care and attention to resist; yet that office may be designed for the virtuous improvement of those who occupy it, its spirit may tend strongly to promote that improvement; and the religion which institutes that office, may be holy and divine, for it is indeed analogous to the whole plan of providence.

I WILL make one supposition more, and that as favourable to our adversaries as they can reasonably desire. I will suppose that the office of a Christian minister exposes him to greater danger of acting viciously than other men. Even this supposition will not avail them much. In this case our station would indeed be hazardous to ourselves: as a few soldiers are sometimes forced to defend a desperate post, in order to preserve a whole army from destruction, so we should be exposed to an imminent danger of losing our own souls, in promoting the salvation of others. But even this would not prove, that our office has an immoral tendency, in any sense which could affect the credit of our religion. It would be only analogous to what happens in the course of nature, that some situations supply stronger and more numerous tempta-

temptations than others; and therefore it could never prove, that the gospel is not derived from the Author of nature.

THESE observations appeared to be necessary for removing the confusion in which the charge against the spirit of our profession has been commonly involved, and for enabling us to detect some of the artifices by which it has been rendered plausible, and seemingly important. The sum is this. If the enemies of our order only prove, that our office tends to form a character in which some agreeable qualities are wanting, or even a character positively disagreeable in some respects; or if they prove, that some circumstances in it may be perverted into occasions of vice, or that it presents peculiar temptations which it will require great caution to avoid complying with, they allege nothing which can justly affect either the spirit of our office, or the religion by which it is established. If they can prove no more, they attack us with insufficient weapons; we may expose our bosoms to their pointless arrows without receiving the slightest hurt. They show their inclination to annoy us; and the undiscerning and the prejudiced may take it for granted, that they have given a mortal wound to religion and its ministers. But the candid and the considerate will soon

perceive, that, in order to accomplish their design, they must evince, that the *original* and *prevailing* tendency of our office is immoral; that something vicious is necessary in order to promote its genuine end, and to discharge its real duties. To discover whether this has ever been evinced, or can indeed be evinced, is the intention of the sequel.

PART

PART II.

WITH a view to discover what is the real spirit of the ministerial office, we proposed, secondly, to enquire, whether that character which it tends to form, be virtuous or vicious on the whole?

OUR office is charged expressly, only with some particular vices: but these are so heinous and so numerous, and softened by the mixture of so few virtues, that, were the charge supported with sufficient evidence, it would imply, that the natural character of a clergyman is, upon the whole, vicious and detestable. I doubt not however but it will appear, by every kind of evidence of which the subject can be supposed capable, that a character, in all respects virtuous, is the natural result of our profession.

MAY it not be asserted, in the first place, with considerable evidence, that the clergy in general are in fact equal, nay superior to other classes of men, in whatever deserves the name of moral virtue? And if this be true,

will it not form an argument in favour of the genius of our calling? For if it really led to vice, it could scarce fail to corrupt the greater number. It is not easy to prove beyond dispute, what depends upon so many instances, what requires the observation of many ages and nations; nor is it possible, on this occasion, to enter on a long detail from history, to support the assertion: but let any person examine with impartiality, and he will find that, in every state of things, ministers of the gospel have had their full proportion of the virtue of the times. In the best and the most virtuous ages, there have been more of this order eminent for virtue, in proportion to the number of those who belong to it, than of any other. In the most degenerate times, when religion has been most perverted from its true design, the morals of the clergy have been higher than on a level with those of the laity. If there be any period, in which it has been otherwise, let our adversaries point it out.—We own they have great advantages on their side.—The ministerial office leads to privacy and retreat; the abuses of it often carry a man into public life. On this account, the vices of those clergymen, who have departed from the genius of their office, are conspicuous, and liable to be exposed by the torch of history: but they who have been steddily actuated by
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its genuine spirit, have passed through life in a virtuous obscurity, revered by those who knew them, their memory honoured for a generation or two, but totally unregarded by history, which confines itself to the actions of the higher ranks of men, or to those actions which had an influence on the revolutions of government, or on the general state of civil affairs.—It will likewise deserve attention, that in some establishments of religion, many clergymen have not been confined to the proper functions of their office, but have devoted themselves chiefly to secular affairs, perfectly foreign to it. It is not in these that we can expect to find the genuine character of the order; for the pastoral office cannot possibly exert its influence on a man who is scarce at all employed in the duties of it. The temper of such a person must necessarily be formed, principally by those secular occupations in which he is most conversant. Yet it is from clergymen in this situation, that persons are readiest to take their idea of the whole body; because they are most exposed to observation.—Our adversaries derive another advantage from the unequal manner in which the comparative importance of different virtues and vices is ordinarily estimated. Temperance, piety, and the other virtues which will naturally predominate in the character of
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a clergyman, are depressed far below their genuine dignity ; and at the same time many vices, frequent among other ranks of men, but rarely to be found among the clergy, are regarded with a more favourable eye than their real deformity deserves. This perversion of moral sentiment, if it be not guarded against, will necessarily diminish the merit of the clergyman, and raise that of the man of the world, and thus disguise their true proportion to each other.—But let our adversaries take no more advantage from these or other circumstances, than themselves can approve as fair ; let them examine what has been the real character of the clergy, not by selecting a few instances on one side only, but by making a complete and impartial induction ; let them make the same allowance in this case, that they would reckon reasonable in other cases ; let them form their judgment chiefly from those clergymen, who have been employed only in the proper duties of their calling ; at least let them distinguish, in others, between the vices which belong to them as clergymen, and those which have sprung from their adventitious occupations ; let the several virtues, and their opposite vices be valued, I will not say, according to the Christian standard, but according to that standard which the unperverted sentiments of mankind have fixed, and
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the best heathen moralists have acknowledged; let them tell us honestly the result of their enquiry. If they should find, that ministers of the gospel have been, upon the whole, more blameless, more virtuous than the rest of mankind, that they have for the most part fallen in latest with a prevailing corruption of manners, that they have often opposed its progress, and been least infected with it, that sometimes the majority of them have totally escaped the contagion of vice which raged among other ranks; they cannot deny that the ministerial office has a strong tendency to promote the practice of universal virtue.

THAT the result of their enquiry will be what we have supposed, I pronounce with the greater confidence, because it seems to be really acknowledged by all mankind. It is an undeniable matter of fact, that the general sense of mankind proclaims vice to be peculiarly scandalous, and virtue to be peculiarly requisite in a clergyman. They who pay little regard to the laws of morality in their own conduct, demand the most spotless virtue in the teachers of religion. Every deviation from strict virtue, every instance of vice in men of this profession, has always excited greater and more general indignation, than similar faults in others. Whence does this universal sentiment arise?

arise? It can arise from no cause which is not obvious to the very senses of mankind; for circumstances which cannot be discovered without close attention and deep penetration, will never affect the generality: their sentiments and judgments are produced only by plain matters of facts. And from what cause can their sentiment on this subject arise, but actual experience of the superior virtue of Christian ministers? Familiar objects never strike us strongly. Vices, which we are accustomed to witness, we soon learn to behold without a great degree of horror. Were a vicious minister very common, men must have long ago regarded him with as little indignation as other vicious men. They are peculiarly shocked with vice in a clergyman, for this reason, because they do not find it so frequently in men of this character as in others,

BUT this sentiment of the peculiar unsuitableness of vice to the profession of a clergyman deserves to be considered farther; for not only do mankind, by means of it, give testimony that virtue is more general among ministers than among others, but it likewise contains a *direct* proof, that the genius of our calling is eminently favourable to virtue. It supposes that all the world is sensible, that ministers of the gospel have, from the very nature

nature of their office, peculiar advantages for being virtuous. If this were not taken for granted, men could never deem vice peculiarly atrocious in a clergyman, they could never exact uniform virtue more rigorously from him than from any other person. When the situation in which a man is placed, lays him under strong temptations to vice, we make allowance for it in our censure of him. We excuse, in some measure, the sallies of youth, because the passions are violent at that time of life. We give some indulgence to the peevishness of old age, because the infirmities incident to that period are powerful temptations to ill humour. We pity, rather than blame a wretch who, overcome by torture, betrays his friend. The judgment is natural, necessary, and well founded. The vices on which we are disposed to pass a heavy censure, are those which a man commits without any inducement from his situation, those which he is under a strong obligation to avoid, and has great advantages for avoiding. When all men, therefore, perceive vice to be incongruous to the character of a clergyman, is not this a confession, that his sacred function has a peculiar fitness for forming him to virtue? Believers and infidels agree in the sentiment on which our argument is founded, and therefore must equally perceive its force. The natural senti-

sentiments even of those who are most forward to censure the spirit of our office, pronounce vice peculiarly odious, and virtue peculiarly necessary in a clergyman; and these sentiments, arising spontaneously and irresistibly in their hearts, are a much stronger proof of their being conscious of the moral tendency of the Christian ministry, than any refined arguments, formed at leisure, can be of the contrary. Let them either acknowledge, that our office urges us powerfully to all virtue, or let them regard those vices which they charge upon it, as more venial and excuseable, as less worthy of disapprobation in a clergyman, than in another.

BEFORE I leave this topic, allow me to make one observation, which seems to be of importance in estimating the real character of a clergyman. It is the judgment of human nature, that every vice has a singular atrocity in him; this judgment could not be formed, except vice were comparatively rare in that profession, and likewise absolutely repugnant to its genuine spirit; yet this very judgment has contributed not a little to bestow plausibility on the assertion, that the spirit of our profession is immoral, an assertion to which it is altogether contradictory. The consequence of this judgment has been, that, while very *high degrees* of vice are overlooked in other men,

or, at most, are slightly blamed, the *least appearance* of every vice in a clergyman is immediately remarked and severely condemned. By this means a few small vices in him appear both greater and more numerous, than many atrocious vices in another, because they are more certainly observed, and more heavily censured. A person is highly disapproved, when he bears the character of a clergyman, who would have been noways censured, if he had belonged to any other order. Thus the very tendency of the ministerial office to promote virtue has led men, first to think ministers more vicious in comparison with others, than they really are; and next, in consequence of this, to charge the office itself with a tendency to vice. We own that mankind do us no injustice in reckoning vice more heinous in us, than in others; but the judgment supposes the spirit of our office to be eminently favourable to virtue; and therefore a person cannot fairly avail himself of it, who denies this, and is examining the real characters of clergymen, in order to determine, whether the spirit of their office be moral or immoral; he ought to estimate *their* actions only by that standard, which he applies to the actions of *others*.

FARTHER, it is worth while to observe, that they who censure the spirit of our profession
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most severely, acknowledge its tendency to be moral in one respect. There is one virtue, strict decency and temperance, which they own that we naturally derive from our employment. They insinuate, indeed, that it is the only one. But if it be evident, that this one virtue necessarily promotes other virtues, and gives us advantages for cultivating them, it cannot be denied that our calling, by its immediate influence on this one, will indirectly, but really tend to form the other parts of a virtuous temper.—Decency and temperance implies at least strict abstinence from all the excesses of pleasure, from the dissipation of gay and thoughtless mirth, and from all those expressions of any of our passions, which are unbecoming. In consequence of this abstinence, the sensual appetites and inferior passions, which are always vicious when they become excessive, and which in others are apt to become excessive by being indulged without controul, will, almost unavoidably, be preserved weak and moderate in a clergyman. This is one important ingredient in a virtuous character.—But this is not all. They who are disposed to regard intemperance and levity with the most favourable eye, can scarce deny that they often prove occasions of leading men into vices much more heinous. There is no crime so atrocious, but a man brutified by excess,

cess, or dissipated by giddiness, may occasionally perpetrate. The basest courses have been taken, in order to procure gratification to pampered appetites. The frequent returns of levity and intemperance may produce repeated acts of any vice, and these repeated acts will, by degrees, render the worst dispositions habitual. Our office, therefore, by confining us to strict rules of decency, preserves us from a situation which would put us in imminent hazard of committing many acts of vice, and of contracting many evil habits. By this means, it has a peculiar tendency to produce a general purity of heart, which undoubtedly confers very considerable worth upon the character.—A strict regard to decency will likewise influence our temper in another way. It implies a constant restraint of vicious principles, concern that our conduct be right and unblameable, and regard to the authority and dictates of the moral faculty. Now there is a natural association among our principles of action, by means of which any one of them prepares the mind for receiving any other that has the same direction. On this account, a regard to decency must have a tendency to introduce into the soul, justice, veracity, humility, meekness, patience, forbearance, and, in a word, all the virtues, which, like itself, hold of controul, and are included in the

idea of self-government. The direct principle of all these is the same with that of decency, a sense of duty, a submission to the law of conscience. As every principle is strengthened by being habitually exerted, the authority of conscience will be confirmed by our regard to decency; it will be enabled to controul every wrong affection with greater ease; and, by being accustomed to submit to its government in one instance, we shall be better disposed to submit to it in all. Indeed men are often surprisingly absurd and inconsistent in their conduct; one passion may be perfectly ungoverned while another is restrained. On this account we cannot affirm that a regard to decency will *necessarily* produce all the virtues of self-government; but it certainly *tends* to have a favourable influence upon them; and our office, by almost *certainly* producing that, will *probably* promote these others.—The principal obstruction to the prevalence of good affections arises from the strength of some vicious passions, which oppose their exercise. A regard to decency, by contributing *directly* to weaken these vicious passions, will lay the mind open to the influence of worthy affections, and will thus give us great advantages for acquiring all those amiable virtues which consist in the exercise of them.—If, therefore, strict decency and temperance result naturally from

from our profession, it must have, at least, an indirect tendency to promote all other virtues. The concessions of our adversaries, however small they may appear, imply that our profession has a real tendency to promote universal virtue.

THESE general arguments, drawn from the real characters of the generality of clergymen, from the natural judgment of mankind, that virtue is peculiarly incumbent on them; and from the influence of that partial virtue which is allowed by all to result naturally from our profession, appeared too important to be wholly omitted, because they not only are conclusive in themselves, but also throw considerable light on the whole of this subject.—But the most direct proof of the tendency of our office, to form us to a temper of universal virtue, still remains. It arises from the nature of that office.

As moral causes have doubtless a very great influence on the characters of men, so all professions, it is allowed, contain fixt moral principles which tend to produce a correspondent character, and have often force enough to alter the disposition, that was received from nature. Now we may learn, with certainty, the tendency of the moral principles essential

to any profession, by examining the nature of that profession, its end, and the proper means of promoting that end. If we survey the ministerial office in this manner, we shall find, that it has an essential tendency to promote a virtuous temper.

THE business of a minister of the gospel is, in brief, to teach religion. The tendency of his office will, therefore, be altogether determined by the nature of the religion which he teaches. Christianity includes all the principles of natural religion, and superadds the revelation of a stupendous dispensation of Providence, for the redemption and reformation of an apostate world, by Jesus Christ. The truths of natural theology, especially as they are illustrated and refined in scripture, center in this, that *to fear God, and keep his commandment, is the whole of man* *. The peculiar doctrines of revelation teach us, that *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly* †. Both are proposed in the scriptures, the only rule of our teaching, with an express design to form us to the love of God and of man, to make us *perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works* ‡. Religious principles are constantly

* Eccles. xii. 13. † Tit. ii. 12. ‡ 2 Tim. iii. 17.

represented as arguments for all virtue, and addressed to our hopes, to our fears, to our gratitude, to our honour, to our propensity to imitation, to every affection of the human heart that can have any influence on conduct. At the same time, in the scriptures, all the parts of virtue, all the duties of life, are illustrated in the justest, and the most practical manner. Our employment is, to promote the belief and the practice of this religion; to recommend goodness, by publishing truth; to explain virtue, and enforce it by all possible motives. Can such employment tend to form us to any other temper, than that virtue which we inculcate upon others?

It is certainly first of all requisite in a teacher, that he understand the subject of his teaching, and that, for this purpose, he study it with care. Our profession will, therefore; naturally lead us to the diligent and constant study of all the doctrines and duties of religion; it will urge us to *know the holy scriptures* *, to *meditate upon them*, to *give ourselves wholly to them* †, that we may be *able to teach others* ‡. If, then, religious or moral considerations, if precepts, or arguments, if maxims, or sentiments, examples, or rules of virtue

* 2 Tim. iii. 15.

† 1 Tim. iv. 15.

‡ 2 Tim. ii. 2.

have really *any* force, they must exert it *most* in purifying, refining, and exalting the tempers of those whose whole business it is, to attend to them. Since ministers must often think on all these, that they may understand them, and that they may inculcate them upon others; the consequence will be, that, if they are, like other men, subject to the law of habit, incitements to virtue will occur to their thoughts more easily and frequently, than to the thoughts of others, and urge them more powerfully to a suitable behaviour.

A GREAT part of the vice with which other men are infected, arises from the temptations to which they are exposed in the course of their worldly business. Each of them has a temporal vocation, the direct end of which does not coincide with that of their spiritual calling, and which therefore sometimes leads them off from the duties of the latter. But ministers of the gospel have no worldly business: the nature of their office, as well as the authority of scripture, to which they are indispensibly obliged to submit, forbids them to *entangle themselves with the affairs of this life* *; and, by consequence, preserves them, while they continue in their proper province, from

* 2 Tim. ii. 4.

those temptations which produce the greatest part of the wickedness of the world. Our occupation is, to enforce a sense of virtue and religion upon others; and every attempt of this kind is an act of virtue, which tends directly to our own improvement. Every effort which we make in our *particular* vocation, promotes the end of our *general* calling.

Our office leads us to observe our fellow-creatures in all those situations, in which either virtuous principles, or the sense of vice, produce the most conspicuous effects, and tend most strongly to alarm a spectator, and to force him to attend to the opposite natures of good and evil. It introduces us, for example into *the house of mourning**, it conducts us to the bed of death. There we observe virtue supporting those who have been steady in the practice of it, under all the agonies of pain, and enabling them to triumph in the prospect of their dissolution, as a second birth, a glorious birth into the world of pure light and immortality. There we see vice taking fast hold of those in the hour of perplexity, who have formerly eluded its painful grasp; we behold the horrors of remorse, and the

* Eccles. vii. 2.

ghastly fears of guilt; we perceive the wicked, in his latest moments, inheriting the unforsaken sins of his youth; he looks eagerly for comfort to every side; but he can find no comfort; the flattering temptations which have seduced him, already appear to be delusions; he feels already, that all which this world contains, is a vain shadow, that eternity alone is real; and he feels the pains of hell begun already in himself; if his faltering tongue should attempt to dissemble the anguish of his soul, his trembling joints, his beating heart, his agonized and despairing look, proclaim it in more striking language. Is there nothing in all this, by which *the heart* may be *made better* *? Others may have some opportunities of this kind; but our opportunities are so frequent, that the impression made by one instance can scarce decay, till it be revived and strengthened by another. Must not that man be destitute of all principles of reformation, who is not formed to virtue by these means?

It is our business to *instruct* †, to *convince*, to *exhort* ‡, to *charge* ||, to *intreat* §, to *reprove* and to *rebuke* ¶ others. Can a vicious man be

* Eccles. vii. 3.

† 2 Tim. ii. 25.

‡ Tit. i. 9.

|| 1 Tim. vi. 17. 1 Tim. ii. 14.

§ 1 Tim. v. 1.

¶ Ver. 20. 2 Tim. iv. 2.

thus

thus employed, without some secret misgivings, without some inward checks, without sometimes feeling the agonies of remorse? And have these no tendency to excite a man to that genuine virtue which alone can keep his own heart from condemning him? Can ministers allow themselves in any open and known vice, and yet urge abstinence from every vice on others, 'in public, and in private, in the solemn assemblies, and *from house to house* *? Will it not require a degree of impudence and effrontery, which is seldom to be found, even in the most degenerate?

MANKIND are extremely averse from labouring in vain. Let an end be of ever so little importance in itself, yet a person who is actually engaged in the pursuit of it, becomes anxious to attain it, and cannot, without uneasiness, bear the thought of disappointment. The end of our office is of the greatest importance in itself; it is to form mankind to virtue. We cannot promote it, without being highly virtuous ourselves. An *example* of vice, exhibited by us, will render the best *instructions ineffectual*, and will lead men into vice, with much *greater* force than all our exhortations have to urge them to virtue. When this is

* Acts, xx. 20.

the certain consequence of wickedness in ministers, must not we acknowledge, either that they alone of all mankind have no concern for success, and are in love with disappointment, or that they have, from their office, a peculiar and powerful motive to be exemplarily virtuous, to *shew themselves in all things patterns of good works* * ?

THE opinion of the world has very great, often too great, influence on all men. Can it be supposed that it will not likewise have some influence on ministers of the gospel ? It sometimes leads other men astray into vice ; but it invariably urges ministers to the strictest virtue ; for every vice in them appears scandalous to all mankind, and necessarily renders them *contemptible and base before all the people* †. Is it not a considerable advantage, that a motive, so powerful as the sense of character, is constantly applied to us on the side of virtue ?

WILL it not also have some influence on ministers of the gospel, that, in the opinion of the world, the vices of each individual reflect dishonour on the whole order, and bring the office itself into contempt ? Can a man consider with perfect indifference, that he renders him-

* Tit. ii. 7.

† Mal. ii. 9.

self an object of just indignation to thousands of worthy men of his own profession, whom his vices expose to undeserved ignominy? When the meanest artificer is solicitous to represent his own occupation in a favourable light, can we imagine ministers so totally destitute of the most ordinary principles of human nature, as to have no concern to be virtuous, when that alone can prevent *the ministry* from being *blamed**?—Nay, the vices of ministers have still worse effects. Men impute them to religion itself, and censure and disregard it on account of them. Our vices make men to *abhor the offering of the Lord*†; they *cause many to stumble at the law*‡; they *cause the name of God and his doctrine to be blasphemed*; they induce great numbers to *make shipwreck of their faith*, to harden themselves in their sins, and to destroy their own souls. Can this consideration fail to operate powerfully on every man who is not lost to all good principles?

To enumerate all the peculiar inducements which the ministers of Jesus have to pure and exalted virtue, were indeed to explain all the circumstances of the pastoral office. From the few observations which we have made already, it appears evident, that that office

* 2 Cor. vi. 3.

† 2 Sam. ii. 17.

‡ Mal. ii. 8.

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tends to promote virtue in those who exercise it, by many moral causes essential to it, and fit to work on the most universal and unquestionable principles of human nature.

BUT though our office has plainly an essential and unalterable tendency to purify and refine the heart, yet we will acknowledge,—we reckon ourselves nowise concerned to dissemble it—it highly imports us to consider it very often,—that our profession will not form us infallibly to virtue; nay that, if we allow it to fail of producing this its primary and most natural effect, the very circumstances which give us so many advantages for virtue, will render us more deeply and more obstinately wicked than the rest of mankind.—By the original constitution of our nature, habit, which strengthens our *active* principles, weakens all *passive* impressions. The more frequently we consider or feel motives to virtue without being really excited to the practice of virtue, the feebler will be their influence upon us, the greater our insensibility, the more imminent our danger of never yielding to their force. This is an alarming truth to all human creatures, but to ministers of the gospel more alarming than to others. We must revolve and preach the truths and duties of religion so frequently, that if they do not influence

influence us early to sincere and steadfast virtue, they must quickly become familiar and lose their power. Moral and divine considerations must pass so continually through our minds, that in a very short time they will make no impression on us. A person whom our profession does not render virtuous, will become more suddenly and more desperately obdurate in wickedness, than any other man. Nothing contributes more to strengthen any principle, than an opposition which doth not effectually restrain it. Our profession contains the most powerful inducements to virtue; these will, at least, make a vigorous *opposition* to all vicious principles of action; but if the opposition do not subdue them, they will collect all their force in order to surmount it, and they will be strengthened and confirmed by the violent effort. As a sluice which cannot stem a torrent altogether, only renders the inundation greater, and greater still the longer it keeps it back; just so vicious passions which are too violent to be wholly restrained by the fences that our profession raises against them, will produce the most dreadful deluge of wickedness, whenever their fury can break down these fences. If a pastor be really vicious, he will, almost necessarily, be singularly vicious. Nothing less than a total deprava-

depravation of soul can be the effect of a man's resisting the strict obligations to virtue, and abusing the signal advantages for cultivating it, which the pastoral office affords.—In these, and, perhaps, in some other ways, our office may heighten vice in those who refuse to be actuated by its genuine spirit. But this confession will avail our antagonists nothing. Were this a sufficient proof, that our office tends naturally to vice, it would likewise be a proof, that all consideration of our duty, or of arguments for the practice of it, has a natural tendency to render us vicious; for it is certain that the oftener any man reflects on his duty, and the stronger his sense of its obligation is, if he be not really excited to the practice of it, the less chance there is of his ever practising it, the more hardened in vice he will become in time, and the more impetuously ungoverned passions will rage within him.

BOTH from the former arguments, and from the survey that we have taken of the nature of our office, it is plain, that it tends primarily and most naturally to virtue. It promotes not one virtue, but a temper which disposes the mind to the culture of every virtue. It is the abuse of it that leads to vice; and the abuse leads so strongly to vice, only because

cause the office itself has a powerful influence on virtue. If this *general* examination of the genius of our calling be not *necessary* for vindicating it from the aspersions of our adversaries, it is notwithstanding highly *proper* for producing in ourselves, my reverend fathers and brethren, a sense of the strength of those obligations to virtue which we lie under.

P A R T III.

WE will now enquire, **THIRDLY**, how far our office has really a tendency to produce or to inflame those particular vices which some have represented as characteristical of our order.

THIS is the more necessary, because the late Author to whom we have referred, has unwarily admitted some fallacious principles and wrong suppositions, into the reasoning by which he supports the charge. These render his arguments specious, and make those inducements to vice appear to arise from the original and prevailing spirit of our profession, which are really but the partial effects of some of its circumstances, or accidental temptations arising from the abuse of it. And because these fallacies run through all the parts of his reasoning, it will be proper, before we examine the particular vices which he derives from the genius of our calling, to make a few observations on the general method, in which he traces out the tendency of that calling.

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IF we should allow that he has given a true account of the tendency of those circumstances in our profession, which he mentions, yet we might insist with reason, that he has applied the character, which results from them, by far too generally. He justly blames the undistinguished judgments of the vulgar, who comprehend every individual of a nation, without exception, in the same national character. He justly observes, that all that can be asserted with truth is, that some particular qualities will be more frequently met with among some classes of people than others. Has he preserved this necessary caution and delicacy in determining the character of the clergy? He indeed says, there are exceptions. I will not enquire, how far he can seriously admit exceptions, with respect to some particulars, consistently with the manner in which his reasoning is pursued. But certainly it was wrong to combine all the vices which he mentions, into one character, and to ascribe it to most individuals of our order. The same temptation will not prevail with all; but only with those to whose constitution it is adapted. Every day's experience proves, that that may be an irresistible temptation to one man, which makes no impression on another. Though, therefore, the genius of our calling were such as it is described, it could only be inferred, that some of

the vices which are enumerated, will belong to one clergyman, others to another, but not that all these vices will be united in the temper of any considerable number. The circumstances which operate on the character are so various, and on that account the influence of each of them is so precarious, and the turn of mind from which each derives its force is so uncertain, that we ought to reason on this subject with a peculiar degree of diffidence.

It is easy to select a few circumstances, in any profession, which, considered by themselves, may appear to have an immoral tendency; but we cannot thence infer that the profession hath an immoral tendency upon the whole; for the influence of these may be overbalanced by other circumstances equally essential to it. Were we to estimate the character which any profession forms, by the separate view of some circumstances belonging to it, we might represent it in a very unfavourable light. The character of a soldier is reckoned so amiable by this author, that he judges it the fittest to be opposed to ours, in order to set off its deformity. But it is a soldier's business to fight and kill, at the command of his superiors, without examining the justice of the cause.—Were it fair to attend to this circumstance alone, we might say that his employment necessarily

cessarily renders him cruel, arbitrary, a contemner of right, and an absolute pest in society. Such precisely is the reasoning by which this author would prove, that our office necessarily inflames many of the blackest vices of human nature. He has, by some oversight, omitted many circumstances essential to it, which have the most powerful influence on virtue; he has fixed on a few circumstances, some of them really foreign to our office, and others of them but casually and remotely connected with it; he has considered the effects, which these would produce, if they constituted the whole of our office; and I will venture to say, he has exaggerated both these effects, and the causes, from which they are represented as proceeding. In this respect his reasoning is fallacious, being built on an insufficient foundation.

WHEN it appears that any circumstance in a profession, viewed in one light, tends to vice, we cannot always conclude, that even this circumstance tends to vice upon the whole; because it may as naturally, or more naturally, produce other effects of an opposite kind. It is the office of a judge to pronounce sentence exactly according to law, without regard to the ties of relation, to compassion, or to worthiness of character. By considering this circumstance in one point of view, we might be

inclined to think, that this office naturally banishes from the heart, pity, generosity, friendship, the love of relations, and all the amiable offspring of benevolence. But this will not be its natural effect; for this unbiassed regard to right, in opposition to all inducements from affection, is fit to cherish an attachment to public happiness, for promoting which all the rules of justice are calculated; and, by giving constant exercise to the sense of virtue, it strengthens this sense, and enables it to controul all vicious dispositions, and to lay the mind open, by this means, to the operation of every generous, and kind, and worthy affection. But this author has considered those circumstances in our profession, of which he takes notice, only in one point of view; he has observed only some of their consequences on the character, but has unluckily overlooked others, more essential and important, and of a perfectly contrary nature. If this be true, his arguments will be inconclusive, and that may be but a very *partial* tendency, which they would represent as the prevailing spirit of our office.

THIS author begins his character of our profession, by adopting a trite maxim, which, he says, is not altogether false, that *priests of all religions are the same*. I think, it may be easily

easily proved, that this maxim cannot be true. It necessarily supposes, that the way of life and the occupation of priests of all religions is perfectly the same. Different causes can produce the same or similar effects, only by means of those qualities which they possess in common. Every circumstance in an occupation has some influence upon the character. Characters, therefore, perfectly uniform, cannot be the result of occupations which do not coincide in all respects. Politeness and the good qualities related to it, make up the character which this author derives from the profession of a *modern* soldier. He quotes a saying of an antient writer who was perfectly well acquainted with life and manners, that *it is not in the power even of the gods to make a polite soldier*. Yet the way of life of an *ancient* soldier included almost all the circumstances from which he derives the politeness of a *modern* soldier. The very same profession, therefore, may produce perfectly contrary characters, in different periods, by means of a difference in the prevailing manners of the world. It is strange, that an author of uncommon penetration, who had remarked in this instance, that a small change, in the customs of common life, could even reverse the spirit of one profession, should immediately after produce a maxim, which supposes that the greatest change

in religious principles and customs, cannot make any alteration in the character of priests. —Priests, being the ministers of religion, must derive, from their office, a character correspondent to the nature of that religion, in which they minister. But surely the nature of *all* religions is not perfectly the same. This author acknowledges in another place *, that no two nations, and scarce any two men, have agreed precisely in the same religious sentiments; that polytheism of every kind is, most properly, a sort of superstitious atheism, similar to a belief of elves and fairies, which it is great complaisance to dignify with the name of religion. The pagan religion consisted wholly of groundless fables, inconsistent traditions, immoral tales, insignificant ceremonies, and empty pageantry †. Could it then have the same tendency with Christianity, which delivers the genuine principles of theism, which institutes very few ceremonial duties, which every where represents these as subservient to moral virtue, which proclaims, that the alone *weighty matters of the law* are *justice, mercy, fidelity, and the love of God* ‡, which sets before men the most illustrious examples of every virtue, and the strongest motives to the practice of it? Can a

* Natural History of Religion, p. 2, 25, 34. † Ibid. p. 69.

‡ Mat. xxiii. 23. Luke, xi. 42.

pagan priest, wholly employed in the absurd rites of the former, derive *from his office* the same character to which a Christian minister will be naturally formed, by teaching the doctrines, and inculcating the duties of the latter? What one principle almost is common to their functions*? The Protestant religion is very different

* It is plain from the most superficial view of the character which Mr. *Hume* draws for Christian ministers, that he avails himself of all the corruptions of character arising from the absurdities of *Papery* for blackening the clergy in general. I was unwilling, however, to suppose that he designed to represent the character of Christian ministers, derived from their office as the same with that character which *Heathen* priests would receive from their functions. I took it for granted, that this learned author was too well acquainted with antiquity, not to know that the Pagan priesthood was established on a very different footing from the Christian ministry, and that the distinction between *clergy* and *laity* was never heard of in the Heathen world. Candour induced me to believe that a person who must know the purity and excellence of the religion and morality taught in the Scriptures, though he may not reckon it of divine original, could never entertain a thought of setting it on a level with Pagan superstition. I was disposed to ascribe those passages in his writings, which seemed to imply this, to an excess of zeal against those corruptions of true religion, which the folly and wickedness of men have too often introduced. I therefore intended the observations, which have been made above, concerning the difference between Paganism and Christianity, only for illustrating the general principle, that the nature of *all* religions is not perfectly the same, and that, by consequence, all religions cannot form precisely the same character in priests; a principle, which I immediately applied to prove the difference between the natural character of a Popish priest, and that of a Protestant Clergyman. But in a later edition of

different from Popery, both in its form, and in its spirit. The office of a Popish priest is, in consequence

his *Essays*, which did not fall in my way till after the first publication of the Sermon, this author is solicitous to put it beyond doubt that he regards the Heathen priesthood and the Christian ministry as precisely the same office; from which it will be a necessary consequence, that Paganism and Christianity are, in his opinion, the very same religion. He makes this addition to his character of the clergy. "'Twas no bad expedient in the ROMANS, for preventing the strong effect of the priestly character, to make it a law that no one should be received into the Sacerdotal office, till he was past fifty years of age, DION. Hal. lib. 1. The living a layman till that age, 'tis presumed, would be able to fix the character." Any person, who reads this paragraph, would certainly think that *Dionysius* has asserted, that *Romulus* fixed the age of priests to fifty, as an expedient for preventing the strong effect of the same priestly character, which is delineated by Mr. Hume. But in truth, that historian does by no means represent the law of *Romulus* as an expedient for this purpose. He says, "While others generally chose the officers of religion in an improper manner, some selling the dignity, and some disposing of it by lot; he would not allow the priestly office either to be sold, or to be given by lot: on the contrary, he made a law, that out of every ward two should be chosen into the priesthood, above fifty years of age, who excelled the rest in virtue and nobility, who had a plentiful fortune, and were free from every bodily defect." DION. Hal. Ant. Rom. lib. 2. Mr. Hume's account of the intention of this law must, therefore, stand wholly on his own authority. But to what does that authority amount in the present case? When it is first proved that a prince who, according to the account given of him by *Dionysius*, bestowed his first care on the establishment of the religion with which he was acquainted, who reckoned a regard to it the principal means of securing the prosperity of the nation, and who made larger provision for the priesthood, than the founders of
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consequence of this, very different from that of a Protestant minister. The one is continually recommending insignificant ceremonies, as a compensation for real goodness; the other is perpetually inculcating, that nothing can compensate the want of it. Can these employments promote the very same turn of character? It can scarce be said, that priests of these two religions agree in the acknowledgment of the Scriptures; for in popery the Scriptures are made void by legends and traditions. But if they agree in this, the only part of their

any other states, yet believed that religion has an unfavourable influence on good morals: when it is proved that he foresaw that the priestly office tended necessarily to corrupt the character, and contrived this law on purpose to counteract this tendency, and to render the unavoidable corruption as *little* as possible; then Mr. *Hume's* account of the spirit of this law may be admitted as ingenious. But till all this be proved, it is a conjecture not only destitute of all plausibility, but even perfectly improbable.—A great degree of ingenuity, misguided by partiality to a favourite notion, has caused Mr. *Hume* to overlook the *obvious* reason of the *Roman* law. The religion of *Rome* was a political institution, and was constantly rendered subservient to the views of the leading men. The priesthood was an high dignity in the state, to which only patricians were admitted for a long time after the foundation of the city. A certain age was fixed for every magistracy; and the age of fifty was, in like manner, fixed for the priesthood, that it might be bestowed only on persons, who had served their country, and acquired authority in it. When the law in question is considered in this natural and obvious point of view, let any person determine, whether it can, in the least degree, confirm Mr. *Hume's* argument, or has the remotest connection with his subject.

character

character, which they can, on this account, derive in common from their office, is either that which results from the general tendency of revelation, the love of God and man, or those virtues which are recommended particularly to the ministers of religion. And what are these? The Scripture commands them to be *apt to teach, blameless, holy, godly, vigilant, sober, temperate, not given to wine, modest, of good behaviour, just, not covetous, not strikers, not brawlers, not self-willed, not soon angry, patient, forbearing, gentle, meek, peaceable, benevolent, given to hospitality, lovers of good men* *. May these ever be the qualities in which priests of all religions agree! But then their character will be, in every respect, the reverse of what this author has drawn for them.—In a word, because different religions are unlike in many circumstances fit to operate on the character, priests of all religions cannot be the same.

It is not very easy to determine with certainty, what place the false maxim, which we have mentioned, really possesses in this author's reasoning; whether it be one of the principles, which he uses in ascertaining the tendency of

* 1 Tim. iii. 2, 3. Chap. vi. 11. 2 Tim. ii. 22, 24. Tit. i. 7, 8.

the sacerdotal office; or whether it be the conclusion which he draws from circumstances, supposed to belong to that office, in all the various forms of religion.

IF it be a principle on which the reasoning proceeds, it ought to have been clearly proved before it was adopted; for, if it be really false or doubtful, every argument built upon it is destitute of evidence, however plausible it may appear to those who take the principle for granted. If it be considered in this light, there is but one argument produced for proving it. "Priests of all religions are the same, for as chymists observe, that spirits, when raised to a certain height, are all the same, from whatever materials they be extracted; so these men, being elevated above humanity, acquire an uniform character, which is entirely their own." Do you think that this comparison bestows any evidence upon the maxim? Is the distillation of spirits, by a chemical process, a case exactly similar to the forming of a character, by means of religious and moral principles? And is it not somewhat strange, to suppose all priests elevated above humanity, as a step towards proving, that they are all sunk into vices which depress humanity below itself? To produce this as an argument, would be unworthy of this ingenious

genious philosopher, who is well acquainted with the rules of reasoning; who can easily discern the fallacy of very specious arguments; who is even scrupulous in allowing men to reason from one subject to another, in which the least circumstance of similarity is wanting*. It is a mere metaphor, an allusion to a fact so wholly dissimilar, that it has almost too much the appearance of a turn of wit, to be admitted as an apposite image in the more serious kinds of poetry. On this account, I am inclined to think, that the maxim in question was intended, not for a principle in the reasoning, but for the conclusion deducible from it.

BUT if the author really designed to infer, from the nature of our office, that priests of all religions agree in the character which he describes, he ought not to suppose this conclusion in determining the nature of that office. This is plainly reasoning in a circle. Yet many of his arguments rest on this supposition, and will be inconclusive without it. Could this manner of reasoning be allowed, it is obvious that great advantage might be derived from it. By means of it all the basest corruptions of religion come to be regarded as

* Essay on a particular Providence, &c. page 230.

essential parts of it; every thing which, in consequence of the corruption of religion, has ever been attempted by its ministers, in the most degenerate state of things, for supporting or promoting that corruption, comes to be represented as a necessary part of the pastoral office, though it be in fact repugnant to the very nature and design of it.

BUT if we would examine fairly and impartially, what is the tendency of the pastoral office, with respect to any virtue or vice, we must distinguish the *office* itself from the *abuses* of it. In order to this, we must take our account of it only from the Scriptures; we must consider the end for which they declare that it was appointed, the employment on which they put Christian ministers for promoting that end, and the rules which they prescribe concerning the manner of executing their employment. An infidel cannot justly proceed in any other way; for whether the Scriptures have any real authority or not, it is only in them that the institution of this office, or the manner of executing it, is said to be contained. Whatever is not, by the Scriptures, incumbent on a clergyman, is *foreign* to his office, at least; and may be *inconsistent* with it, however generally it be practised. An enquirer must first discover, in this manner, what our office

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vice really is; and then he must consider all the circumstances of it together, trace out all the natural effects of each, balance the good and the bad effects of the same circumstance, and weigh the tendencies of different circumstances against one another, before he can expect to determine its genuine spirit. This will be, indeed, a difficult and complex induction; but philosophers know well, that an induction equally severe is requisite, before a certain conclusion can be established, in subjects of a less intricate nature than the formation of human characters. Whether the author whose arguments we are examining, has observed this method; whether, in estimating our character, he has not, on the contrary, fixed on some circumstances in our profession, considered even these but in one light, pointed out only some of their effects upon the character, unduly exaggerated particulars, and argued from circumstances foreign to the office of a Christian minister, nay wholly contradictory to it; I will appeal to the impartial; I will appeal to his own candour, after he has reviewed his arguments, by the acknowledged rules of reasoning. It will appear, in some measure, from the following examination of those vices which our office is said to have a fixt and unalterable tendency to promote.—They are *hypocrisy, superstition, ambition, vanity,*
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party-spirit, rancour. Truly a black catalogue of the most diabolical vices! Had one of us drawn such a character for the laity in general, or for any particular profession, would it not have been cited as an instance of *priestly fury*? But destitute as we are represented to be of the noble virtues of *humanity, meekness and moderation*, we will content ourselves with submitting our cause coolly to the cognizance of reason.

DO those abominable vices, which have been mentioned, indeed compose the genuine character of the ministers of Jesus? Are these the natural result of their profession? Say, Christians, when you look around you, and observe the ministers who come within your knowledge, do you really find *these* to be the qualities which are predominant in the temper and conduct of the greatest part of them?—Would you be disposed to give greater *indulgence* to these vices in a minister than in another? Or would not your hearts condemn them as *unsuitable* to his profession? If these vices resulted necessarily from our office, would it not follow, that mankind must be disposed to excuse *them* in ministers, on account of the difficulty of their avoiding them? But can our adversaries say, that hypocrisy, ambition, pride, rancour, or any other vice in that horrid catalogue,

catalogue, by which they describe the spirit of our calling, is regarded with a more favourable eye in one of us, than in men of a different occupation? The weak may not perceive some exertions of these principles to be vicious, the prejudiced may mistake them for virtuous: but whenever they are at all disapproved as wrong, are not they, as well as other vices, condemned with singular severity in a clergyman? Doth not the common sense of mankind thus declare that our office tends to promote the virtues opposite to these, as well as other virtues? Some vices are reckoned more indecent in a clergyman than others; but *all* vices are reckoned more indecent in him, than in any other man. Some virtues are esteemed more indispensibly necessary than others, but *every* virtue is esteemed more requisite in this profession than in other professions.

THERE are two circumstances in our profession, which, it is said, necessarily form us to *hypocrisy*.—One is the obligation which it lays us under to observe strict decency.—Decency consists in abstaining from all behaviour that is either vicious or offensive. The most natural principle of this abstinence is virtue; and our office obliges us to decency, only by obliging us to blameless virtue. Did it exert its full influence upon our character, we should

should not stand in need of dissimulation, in order to appear virtuous. Indeed, it cannot be expected, in the present imperfect state, that this office will exert its full influence universally, or produce that exalted virtue which it demands, in all who exercise it. On this account many ministers may have an inducement, from their profession, to endeavour in particular instances, to conceal vices and imperfections which really belong to them. Yet still this is but a secondary tendency, by which the profession cannot be fairly characterized; a tendency too, which reflects honour upon it, because it proceeds only from the strength of its original tendency to virtue.—And is that conduct which even this secondary tendency produces, absolutely blameable? Can it be allowed, that all reserve is criminal hypocrisy? Is every man obliged in honesty to discover to others all the faults of which he is conscious in himself? Is it not *right* to conceal our vices from the knowledge of others, by all lawful means? Will it not in some measure prevent the infection of our bad example? Certainly it is not criminal for a person to endeavour to reform himself from any vice which he has contracted. Yet this can be done, only by setting a guard over his words and actions, and abstaining from giving scope to those wrong passions which continue to

solicit him very powerfully. May not a minister abstain from the practice of vices to which he is disposed, from a sense of duty, or from a desire to extirpate them by degrees; or may not he abstain from things which he knows to be lawful, in charitable indulgence to the weakness of others, or from a regard to character, without any fault, without being liable to the charge of hypocrisy, without incurring any danger of destroying the candour and ingenuity of his temper, or making an irreparable breach in his character? Is not the conduct rather laudable?—Indeed, if a clergyman be obstinately wicked, he will be exposed to a temptation, from his office, to *blameable* hypocrisy. In every profession, the vicious are often induced to affect an appearance of virtue, in order to promote their designs. The pastoral office will not render every individual really virtuous. But it cannot be executed by a person who is known to be vicious. It is, therefore, probable that a vicious minister will put on a false shew of goodness. But shall the whole order be, for this reason, charged with affecting a continued grimace, in order to support the veneration of the ignorant vulgar, and promote the spirit of superstition? Absurd *corruptions* of religion there have been, which were intended for promoting a spirit of superstition,

tion, and which could not be supported without an implicit veneration of the priest: but to argue from these, is to confound the vilest perversions of religion with Christianity, the basest prostitutions of the pastoral office with the office itself. Where do the Scriptures enjoin a clergyman to promote a superstitious spirit? The clergyman who aims at it, pursues a wrong end, suggested to him by his corrupt passions, not by his office, to which it is altogether foreign; and the same corrupt passions lead him to pervert his office, that it may become subservient to this end. For what part of the pastoral function is the blind veneration of the ignorant vulgar requisite? Indeed, we cannot execute our office, without being careful to deserve esteem; virtue alone deserves it; our office, therefore, prompts us strongly to virtue. If any of us attempt to supply the want of virtue, by affected grimace, in order to procure esteem, he uses unlawful means of accomplishing a lawful end; he is guilty of base hypocrisy, the temptation to which arises indeed from his office, but arises solely from its rendering virtue necessary for the execution of it. If any of us weakly mistake grimace for the genuine dignity of virtue, he confounds a vice with a good quality, to which it bears some general resemblance.—

But how does the ministerial office contribute to the mistake? Do any of the duties of that office, described in Scripture, or does the example of our Saviour, who *came eating and drinking* *, or the example of his Apostles, lead into it? It arises only from the weakness of men, which produces similar instances of self-deceit in all professions.—We may add, that our danger of being seduced into hypocritical grimace cannot justly make the character of our order appear in a disadvantageous light, when it is compared with the character of other ranks of men. The weakness of our nature may render that corruption of religion and of our office, from which the temptation to hypocrisy arises, very frequent; but the same cause will as frequently introduce dishonest views, and dishonest artifices, of different kinds, into other professions. When the pastoral office is actually perverted from its real end, to promote the purposes of a corrupt religion, the temptation to hypocrisy may be very strong, so as actually to prevail with many of our order; but the perversions of other professions afford temptations, to those species of dishonesty and craft which suit them, as irresistible and as universally prevalent. The

• Matth. xi. 19.

hypocrisy which arises from our compliance with these temptations, is highly blameable and pernicious, but is not generally baser or more destructive than the various frauds and artifices, which are practised by bad men in other callings.——On the whole, our office leads primarily to real virtue, not to an affected appearance of it; it very naturally produces a grave and serious temper, and a cautious attention to our deportment, which may be disagreeable to the gay and dissipated, and which they may uncharitably charge with hypocrisy, because of its contrariety to their own manners, but which is totally distinct from vicious grimace: corruptions of religion may pervert our office so far as to lead us to pursue ends, which cannot be accomplished without affected grimace; but the temptation to it is to be imputed, not to our office, or to religion, but to the corruption of both, and to the weakness and fault of individuals; and whatever degree of grimace may really prevail among the clergy, it cannot justly expose them to peculiar disapprobation, because many kinds of dishonest art, as odious to the full as this, are equally general among other ranks of men.

IT is likewise said, that our office promotes hypocrisy by leading us to be employed in the exercises of religion oftener than we can be possessed with the real spirit of devotion.—It leads us, indeed, to be frequently employed in the exercises of religion. The natural tendency of this is, to improve a temper of piety in our souls; for every habit is formed and strengthened by frequent exercise. Ministers will sometimes find their devotion languid, when they are called to exercise it. But the more constantly an affection is exerted, the stronger and more habitual it is rendered by this means, the less will a person be indisposed for exerting it. If, therefore, our office leads us to be more constant in the exercises of devotion than other men, it will necessarily render us less subject than others to fits of languor. They who have not originally a higher or more constant spirit of devotion than the generality of mankind, will naturally acquire it by being engaged in our profession. It cannot be denied that our employment has an essential and strong tendency to form us to eminent and constant piety, the most necessary and the most excellent of all virtues, without absurdly supposing, either that frequent acts of any virtue have no tendency to promote a habit of that virtue, or that the strength
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of a habit has no tendency to lead us to act frequently upon it.—But it is said, that our office obliges us to affect devotion often, when we are already jaded with the exercises of it, or when our minds are engaged in worldly occupations. Suppose that it sometimes called us to devotion, when we are in this situation. Is it necessarily unlawful to attempt to exert a good affection, when a person is ill-disposed to it? If the attempt proceed from a sense of duty, it is surely virtuous. And it is remarked by philosophers *, that one of the most proper seasons for exerting a principle so as to improve it, is when we are worst disposed. Then a strong effort will be necessary to overcome the opposition arising from our reluctance; and by this effort the principle will acquire greater strength, than if it had been exercised more easily †. When other men find themselves indisposed for devotion, they may be tempted to neglect it; by neglecting it they will become more indisposed, and are thus in danger of becoming, by degrees, habitually impious; but a clergyman, being under a necessity, from his office, to exercise it, is led, by this means, to take one of the fittest opportunities for cul-

* Bacon de Aug. Scient. lib. 7. cap. 3.

† Hume's Dissert. on the Passions, page 176.

tivating a temper of real piety.—As our affections arise directly from just conceptions of their objects, we can seldom be so averse from the exercise of any affection, that it cannot be produced by due attention to its object. Our office leads us to frequent meditation on that God who is the object of devotion, and on all those subjects which can render our sentiments of his perfections vigorous and lively. It thus affords us the proper and direct means of rousing pious affections, when they are languid. And since our office thus fixes us in contemplation of God, and obliges us frequently to exercise devout affections towards him, we must be grossly faulty, if we be, at any time, so ill-disposed, as to approach him with feigned devotion. By these advantages which our profession gives us, piety may be rendered so habitually predominant in our temper; that it shall eagerly seize every opportunity of acting, and that we shall be able to exercise sincere devotion, in circumstances in which they who are seldom employed in religious duties, judging of us by themselves, may think it impossible, and censure our worship as hypocritical.—But is there no danger that we may be contented with going the round of religious exercises, without being at pains to excite the inward affections which ought to animate them?

them? And if we should, will not this produce hypocrisy? Undoubtedly. Mere formal worship, frequently gone about, tends to make us think that we are already possessed of those inward affections from which our worship should have proceeded, and thus prevents our setting ourselves to cultivate them, and confirms us in hypocrisy. This danger arises from the very constitution of human nature, and extends to all external actions, which may sometimes proceed from other principles than the virtue to which they correspond, and will, in that case, disguise our want of that virtue from us. If ministers, notwithstanding the peculiar advantages which their profession gives them for cultivating a temper of real piety, engage in devotion without exciting that temper into act, they will be in greater danger than others, of becoming insensible of their want of piety, and will more quickly contract a strong habit of hypocrisy, by reason of their frequent calls to devotion. But is this habit really worse, than a want of all appearance of religion, which these men would have infallibly run into, from the same degeneracy of mind, in any profession which did not give them frequent calls to devotion? Or though it were, can our profession be justly blamed for requiring those acts of devotion, from the wrong performance of
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of which that habit springs? If it could, it must follow, that *all* exercise of devotion is not only useless but highly dangerous. Nay, on this principle, all good external actions must be censured, as tending to corrupt the character, because they may be performed when they do not proceed from their natural principle; and because, when they are thus performed, they will rather obstruct, than promote the improvement of that principle.—But, after all, a clergyman can really be in no *peculiar* danger from the *public* exercises of religion, because in them all the people profess to join; and yet they alone appear to be intended by this Author. He seems to have had those priests in his eye, who are almost constantly employed in running over forms of devotion, in a language which the people do not understand. But is it fair to draw an argument from them, to clergymen, who, by their office, only preside in those exercises of devotion in which all the people are as much concerned as they? He seems likewise to confound mechanical warmth and extasy, which must needs be transient, with calm and rational piety, which may actuate the mind as habitually, and uninterruptedly, and be as much in readiness to exert itself, whenever an occasion offers, as gratitude, friendship, or any other affection of the human heart.—In a word,
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our profession is singularly fit to form us to sincere and exalted piety, by obliging us to frequency in those exercises of devotion, by the right performance of which alone a temper of piety can be formed, and by giving us great advantages for performing them aright; we may indeed perform them in a wrong manner, it may require strict attention to avoid it; if we do not bestow this attention, we may become hypocritical in our devotions; but the fault will be chargeable, not on our office, but on ourselves, who have resisted its primary and natural impulse.

To conclude this head, the prevailing tendency of those functions in which we are employed, is to promote virtue and piety; they will tempt the obstinately vicious to hypocrisy, but they could not cease to tempt them to this, without ceasing to urge powerfully to universal goodness. Those only will become hypocrites by being engaged in our profession, who would have been either dishonest or abandoned, if they had followed another occupation.

ANOTHER of the vices imputed to our office is *superstition*, leading us to regard an appearance of religion, or zeal for religious observances, as a full compensation for all
vices

vices and violations of morality.—But is there any spirit against which the Scriptures, the only rule of our instructions, guard mankind with greater care? Can we teach the religion of *Jesus*, without making it a great part of our business to warn our people against this vile perversion of devotion? What circumstance can there be, then, in our profession, that puts us in peculiar danger of superstition? This Author really mentions none. Instead of supporting his charge, instead of attempting to prove, that superstition is one of those characters, which are entirely our own, he observes that all mankind almost have a strong propensity to it; an observation, which is inconsistent with its being peculiar to the clergy. Our office, indeed, naturally tends to form us to a temper of devotion; but from the warmth of genuine devotion, superstition never can arise. On the contrary, it is plain from the nature of the dispositions themselves, as well as from the declarations of Scripture, that reverence, and love of God, gratitude to him, submission to his providence, regard to his authority, and to his judgment of us, and all the other parts of real piety lead to universal virtue, and cannot be completed without producing it. All mankind appear to be sensible of this. They will allow a person to be really just or temperate, though some other virtues be plainly wanting

wanting in his character. But if a man want any virtue, and have an appearance of piety, they determine that his piety is insincere and hypocritical; conscious, that, if it were genuine, it could not fail to produce every moral virtue.—If men be apt to suspect the probity of those who put on an extraordinary appearance of religion, their judgment may be easily accounted for. For it is too obvious to escape their notice, that real piety is attended with little show; and it is an observation which all men make in numberless other cases, that whenever a man affects any good quality which he does not really possess, he is sure to overact his part.—But we need not dwell on this article of the charge; for the Author, instead of producing any evidence for it, indulges himself in remarks, which only tend to depreciate all religion, by confounding it with superstition. An examination of this point, though it be important in itself, is foreign to our present subject.

THE clergy have been often accused of *ambition*, and the accusation has been moulded into many different forms. This Author chuses to represent them as a set of men whose ambition can be satisfied, only by promoting ignorance, and superstition, and implicit faith, and pious frauds, that, by arguments drawn

from another world, they may move this world at their pleasure; whereas the ambition of other men may commonly be satisfied, by excelling in their particular profession, and thereby promoting the interests of society.—Is this a fair comparison of our character with that of others? Is it not plainly a comparison of laudable ambition in them, with the greatest corruption of that principle in us? But is the ambition of other men always of the praiseworthy kind? Is it this that has prompted individuals to raise themselves by supplanting better men, by fraud, by perfidy, by assassinations, by every the most shocking crime? Is it this that has distracted kingdoms with faction and rebellion, and filled the world with war and bloodshed? Will it be said, that the ambition of the laity has never appeared in this form, or produced these effects? And is not this the form of it, which ought, in just argument, to have been opposed to wrong-turned ambition in a clergyman? On the other hand, will it be asserted, that our office does not suggest to us a laudable object of ambition, which will bear to be compared with the desires of others, to serve mankind by excelling in their own professions? Our office, brethren, *naturally* proposes to us only one object of ambition, the noblest indeed that can be proposed, to be *workers together with*
God,

God, and with Christ, in recommending *righteousness* to mankind *, and thus promoting the most valuable interests of society. It is the *direct* end of our office, to excite mankind, by the discoveries of a future world, which reason and revelation make, to that conduct which alone can promote their true happiness, both in time and in eternity. If we misapply these engines, to move men at our pleasure, or to render them subservient to our designs, we basely deviate from the end of our vocation, and, instead of it, pursue an opposite, and unworthy and pernicious end. And shall that be imputed to our office, which is contradictory to its whole design?—But may not our office contribute, in some way to this conduct? Most men are prone to prefer present and temporal, to spiritual and eternal objects, and to pursue them by whatever means they can. Many, who were not of our order, have often prostituted religion, by making it a tool for promoting their secular ends. The vice is not, therefore, peculiar to our order. To be employed in the functions of our office will never lead a man to form these worldly designs, which can be accomplished by a prostitution of religion; these are suggested by the viciousness of his own temper,

* 2 Cor. v. 20. 21. chap. vi. 1.

or by his being engaged in foreign occupations, and would not probably have been formed, if he had confined himself to his proper business. Indeed, when ambitious views are, from these causes, once formed by a clergyman, he will endeavour to promote them by those religious instruments which his office affords, more readily than by any others, because they are most directly in his eye. His office obliges him to apply them to the most glorious purpose; this is an argument for its excellence: his wickedness prompts him to misapply them to bad purposes; this is wholly his own fault. Ought the world to have been deprived of the only means by which virtue and happiness can be obtained, because the abuse of them may sometimes be pernicious? This vice cannot, therefore, justly be imputed to the genius of our calling, for it has no primary or essential tendency to promote it; on the contrary it has a very remote, indirect, and accidental influence upon it; it will supply a temptation to it very seldom, never except by reason of the previous corruption either of individuals, or of the spirit of religion; the vice will not be generally characteristical of our order, except in the most degenerate state of things; on this account, and likewise because ambition often assumes the same form in the rest of mankind, and because other forms

forms of it are equally detestable and pernicious, particular instances of clergymen applying religion to selfish or worldly purposes cannot, with any reason, render the character of the profession peculiarly odious.—If we promote ignorance, and superstition, and implicit faith, and pious frauds, for any end, we use the most unjustifiable means. But it is impossible, that our office can, in the remotest manner, prompt us to use them. The method, by which its genuine end can be promoted, is the *manifestation of the truth**; our business is *rightly to divide the word of truth*† to all, to diffuse religious and moral knowledge to the utmost of our power. Is this the same with promoting ignorance and error? Say, all the world, is it not perfectly the reverse? Our office tends so directly to make us *apt to teach*‡, that it cannot even afford a temptation to the conduct of which we are accused, till it be first perverted to the very opposite of what it ought to be. It cannot put it in our power to pursue this conduct, except all the rest of mankind be, in one way or another, as degenerate as ourselves.—What then could lead a person to charge our office with a tendency, absolutely contradictory

* 2 Cor. iv. 2. † 2 Tim. ii. 15.

‡ 1 Tim. iii. 2. 2 Tim. ii. 24.

to its genuine spirit? There is one religion, the priests of which pursue this unnatural conduct. Christianity was gradually corrupted from its genuine purity, during several ages of ignorance and barbarity, by a mixture of the grossest absurdities of Paganism. The monstrous medley could not bear examination, and therefore the priests of the *Romish* church betook themselves to the only means by which it could be protected from contempt or indignation. But is it candid to transfer their character, to other Christian ministers, whose conduct is avowedly the contrary?— This were to take it for granted, that priests of all religions are the same, not only *without* evidence, but really in *contradiction* to the evidence of actual experience. This character sprung, not from the office of teaching religion, but from men's having ceased to teach true religion: it can be ascribed only to those causes which produced the corruption of religion, and, by that means, necessarily changed the business of the sacred function, and reversed the natural character of the clergy.

IT is affirmed, likewise, that we lie under a peculiar temptation, from our office, to *vanity*, and an overweening conceit of ourselves, because we are regarded with veneration, and are even deemed sacred, by the ignorant multitude

titude.—There are few situations, from which men may not take occasion from criminal vanity; for there are few, which do not give persons some real or imaginary advantage; and every opinion of advantage, however trivial, *may* produce an high conceit of ourselves. But the more important, or the more exalted any station is, the stronger its temptations to this vice. Our office has plainly very considerable dignity; the provinces of the philosopher and the orator are united in it; it is designed for the noblest end, for training men to virtue, and fitting them for eternal happiness. It is by its excellence alone, that it leads us to set a value on ourselves; and it has this tendency in common with every thing, which has any degree of worth.—But it is not every kind of self-esteem, that can be reckoned faulty. A just sense of any real and important advantage is not blamed in others, and cannot be blameable in us. It must be owned, however, that all men are very prone to an excess of pride, and very ready to express it in an improper manner. Vanity, ostentation, arrogance, insolence, are highly censurable, both in ministers, and in others. But the censure is due solely to the individuals who abuse the advantages of their situation, to foster these vices in their souls. The fault will be peculiarly chargeable on individuals in our profession,

because it gives us strong inducements to avoid it. The very dignity of our office will fill a man of an ingenuous spirit with deep humility, when he compares it with his own unworthiness. *Who is sufficient for these things**? Its functions will lead us to fix our thoughts often on the majesty of the divine nature; and, when we think of it, *what is man?* and what is *the son of man*†? And can we always avoid reflecting, that the humble and *lowly Jesus*‡ is our founder? If we cannot, will not his example have some tendency to form *this mind in us, which was also in him*§?—The principle of sympathy is very powerful. By means of it we enter into all the sentiments of others. The good opinion of the world cannot fail to have a considerable influence on our judgment of ourselves. But have ministers of the gospel any peculiar security for veneration or respect? It is plain, that many professions are, in the general estimation of the world, more reputable than theirs. It will be difficult to point out any set of men, on whom greater reproach and contempt has been poured out, *for their works sake*, than the teachers of religion. Undistinguished reflections on this order are thrown out without

* 2 Cor. ii. 16.

† Psal. viii. 4.

‡ Mat. xi. 29.

§ Philip. ii. 5.

reserve, and hearkened to with pleasure, by many who would regard general censures of any other body in the gross, as an evidence of prejudice and ill-breeding. If, therefore, general reproach and ridicule have any tendency to mortify the vanity of mankind, the clergy, at least in the present age, are furnished with a peculiar antidote against vanity.—All the veneration, which we can expect on account of our office, it is insinuated, is that of the ignorant multitude. We will not complain of the unjust severity of this insinuation; we hope that our profession may give us a right, while we maintain a character becoming it, to the respect of the most knowing. It will prompt us more strongly to vanity, by this means; but if we allow that passion to have any other effect, than to give us a new reason for endeavouring to deserve their esteem, it will be wholly our own fault. If we cannot expect the esteem of the discerning, we can scarce have an irresistible temptation to vanity, from the veneration of the ignorant, except we be formed very differently from all other men, who are most apt to be elated with the approbation of the most knowing judges. And, truly, in the present age, we cannot certainly obtain the veneration even of the ignorant; they who oppose religion, or inveigh against its ministers, are formidable rivals to us. Their

are not generally like this Author. His infidelity will probably rob him of some part of the attention and regard, which his philosophical-genius and taste would have otherwise commanded from the curious and intelligent. But almost all the rest owe their reputation solely to their irreligion, and must have been neglected or contemned, even by the most ignorant and careless reader, if they had attempted to write on any other subject.

PART

PART IV.

OUR office is, also, censured, because it leads us to bear a *great regard* to the members of our own profession, and to have a *particular concern* for the interests of our own body.—But can this be culpable? Because our power to do good is very limited, because our beneficence would become useless, if it were dissipated equally among all mankind, God has wisely formed our constitution in such a manner, that benevolence rises in very different degrees towards different persons. The human heart is so strongly turned to love, that we eagerly take occasion for exercising a peculiar degree of this affection, not only from relation, personal qualities, or favours received, but also from more trivial circumstances, a name, a neighbourhood, or the like. This constitution of nature necessarily leads men to love those of their own profession, and to be concerned for the interest of the society to which they belong. Was this ever before censured as vicious? To neglect this were highly blameable. It is chiefly by particular kind affections, that men are linked together in soci-

ety.—If the interests of clergymen of the same religion be really united more closely, than the interests of those of other professions; our office has a direct tendency, by this circumstance, to prompt us strongly to one species of benevolence and public spirit, and thus is peculiarly fit to promote one of the most amiable virtues. The interests of men of other professions not only are *distinct*, because each carries on his business apart, but often *interfere*, and by this means, the love which they ought to bear to one another, is extinguished. Ought it not to be mentioned to the honour of our profession, instead of being objected to it as a reproach, that it does not expose us to this danger?—All particular attachments may, indeed, be carried too far, and obstruct the exercise of other social virtues; love to a family may render a man negligent of the good of his country; even patriotism may make a man too careless about the interests of the kind. But is that constitution of our nature which makes us capable of these attachments, to be blamed on this account? In like manner, if some clergymen pervert that just benevolence which they owe to their society, into a narrow party-spirit, disposing them to sacrifice the interests of the laity, or leading them to aim at the support of their own peculiar tenets, or at the suppression of antagonists, instead of the

real

real interest of the order, which always coincides with the interest of truth and virtue, and, by consequence, with the interest of mankind; is the office to be therefore censured? It gives occasion to this misconduct, only by containing a circumstance which has a direct tendency to promote an amiable virtue, but which is capable of being abused by the folly or perverseness of men.—At the same time, our office tends strongly to prevent the abuses which might arise from an excessive attachment to our own society. We teach a religion which represents us and all mankind as connected together by every endearing relation which can excite the tenderest love, and by every similitude of condition, which can improve our love by sympathy and fellow-feeling. Our office sets frequently in our view the general connexions of the children of men; and it unites us with mankind by peculiar ties. It interests us in their most important concerns, it engages us in the most affectionate intercourse with their very souls. Benevolence can be cherished only by those exercises of beneficence, for which the circumstances of men give opportunity. A minister has all the same opportunities of doing good, with another man; and, if he really execute his office, he must have many opportunities peculiar to himself; for he can seldom spend a
day

day without being led to inform the ignorant, to comfort the distressed, to confirm the wavering, to cultivate the seeds of goodness in the minds of men. Such employment is certainly fit to melt the heart into love, and to make it to overflow in streams of good-will to the whole human race.—When this Author represented the clergy as a separate body, wholly unconnected with society, I am apt to think, that he had in his eye only one set of clergymen, those priests whom the law of celibacy and a monastic life cut off from all the ordinary relations to mankind. Indeed they are scarce a part of society, they have an *independent* interest, by which they are firmly united among themselves, by which they are often prompted to conspire in opposing the interest of society, and for promoting which their religion is evidently framed. But is it fair to ascribe a character, which springs from *peculiarities* in their situation, to clergymen of other professions, who are joined with society by all the same tender charities, as other men? To speak the truth, by means of these, the interest of individual clergymen is so much interwoven with that of the rest of mankind, or so much dependent on their favour, that they are in considerable danger of bearing too *little* regard to the members of their own body, and of becoming the tools of the laity in promoting

moting designs which a concern for the interests of their own society *ought* to urge them to oppose.

IN the last place, the spirit of our profession is said to promote *impatience of contradiction, bigoted rancour, bitterness, and fury against antagonists*.—When we consider, brethren, the genius of the Christian religion, as it is delineated in Scripture, we can scarce expect to find this vice among either the ministers or the professors of it: for it is indeed *the gospel of peace* *, its *end is charity* †, its *spirit* is moderation and forbearance ‡, it is wholly designed to root out of the hearts of men *all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil-speaking, malice*, and to make them *kind, tender-hearted, forgiving, loving* and benevolent §. Is it possible that the teachers of this religion can derive from their office a perfectly contrary spirit? If this office do not tend to sweeten the temper, and to give peculiar advantages for meekness, moderation, and humanity, it will be difficult to say, what are the proper means of cultivating these noble virtues.—The character and the office of a Christian minister are described in Scripture, as perfectly suitable to the benign

* Rom. x. 15. † 1 Tim i. 5.

‡ Luke ix. 54, 55, 56.

§ Eph. iv. 31, 32. chap. v. 1, 2.

spirit of his religion. *The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing them that oppose themselves* *; *reproving, rebuking, exhorting with all* LONG-SUFFERING *and doctrine* †. This employment is so far from leading to the least degree of malevolence or wrath, that it cannot be executed aright, if we give any scope to this disposition.—But when we attend to the history of the Christian church, we find it, in contradiction to the spirit of the gospel, filled with fierce contentions, often about trifles, producing angry zeal, and cruel persecutions on account of religious differences. Had these things been peculiar to the clergy, we might have regarded a temper of blind zeal, as a vice to which our profession lays us under peculiar temptations, intended for our trial, which it will require our utmost vigilance to avoid complying with. Yet even in this case, we should have been able to evince that they are temptations which reflect no real dishonour on the pastoral office, because they arise from a *perversion* of it. But indeed a spirit of bitter zeal has not been peculiar to the clergy; it has infected all ranks among the laity, in almost every age of the Christian church. What has been the cause of this?

* 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25.

† Chap. iv. 2.

And

And does not it affect the credit of the gospel itself?—In order to answer these questions, we may observe, that Christianity, as it is exhibited in the Scriptures, is a system, not of curious speculations, or intricate disputes, but of plain and simple facts, fit to affect the heart and influence the practice. It is proposed, not with a view to exercise the ingenuity of men, but expressly as a *doctrine according to godliness*; and it is represented in that manner which fits it most for promoting this important end. As the principles of common sense, which the powerful hand of the God of nature has impressed indelibly upon the human soul, influence the actions of those who have never made them an object of reflection or enquiry, in ordinary life; so the principles of true religion, which the same God has revealed in the gospel, firmly embraced and thoroughly digested, will exert their full force upon the religious and moral conduct of those who are no wise qualified to answer all the difficulties, or even to comprehend all the abstruse questions, that may be raised in relation to them. But men are prone to refinement on every subject, to nice disquisitions concerning the manner of things, and to contentions with those who receive not their theories, or advance others repugnant to them. Even the most obvious and irresistible dictates of common

mon sense have been called in question by the subtlety of philosophers; and, had nature left it in our power not to act upon them, till these disputes were determined, the most necessary functions of life would have been suspended, and immediate ruin would have ensued. Now, brethren, the Christian religion has been treated like every thing else; it has been made a subject of endless cavil and disputation. Men have set themselves to refine upon its simple tenets; and, instead of representing it in a manner fit to operate upon the principles of action, they have reduced theology to a system of subtle controversies. We are so prone to disputation, that the greatest ignorance to which mankind can be reduced, does not prevent it altogether. But the introduction of this evil into religion was immensely forwarded by the universal authority, obtained by that system of philosophy which *Aristotle* had established, in declared opposition to all his predecessors, and which, in conformity to the spirit of its Author, was wholly calculated for wrangling and altercation, and absolutely intolerant to all who opposed it. The spirit of this false philosophy diffused itself over religion, as well as over every other subject, filled it with innumerable subtle questions, and, by this means, rendered it unfit to influence the practice: for the man-

ner of representing any doctrine, with a view to guard it studiously against the cavils of adversaries, will ever be very different from the manner in which it must be represented, in order to move the heart. A system of principles of any kind, which spends itself in disputes, must be barren of works, and useless with respect to practice. It can produce only contentions, with all the fierce passions that must needs attend them. Thus Christianity has been perverted, by a false philosophy, from its real nature and design; and from this perversion have arisen religious heats and animosities and a bitter and persecuting spirit.

THE Apostles foresaw this depravation of religion, and put both ministers and people on their guard against it, warning them to *beware, lest any man should spoil them through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ**; not to give heed to fables, which minister questions rather than godly edifying†; to avoid foolish and unlearned questions, knowing that they engender strifes and contentions, and are unprofitable and vain‡. And the Apostle Paul intimates plainly, that they consent not to the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doc-

* Col. ii. 8. † 1 Tim. i. 4. ‡ 2 Tim. ii. 23. Tit. iii. 9.

*trine which is according to godliness, who dote about questions, and logomachies, whereof cometh envy, strifes, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds**. But Christians have not been so wise as to regard these warnings. They have deviated from the spirit of the gospel, they have corrupted it into a disputatious theology by foreign mixtures; and hence malevolent passions have arisen. But can they be imputed to the spirit of the gospel, when they have been introduced by men's contradicting its spirit? Can we be infected with them by teaching the gospel, when their cause is plainly teaching something else, instead of the gospel? They are a gross abuse of the gospel. But there is nothing incapable of being abused. They have been very frequent in the Christian church. Perhaps God permitted them for the exercise and probation of Christians, that, as they have much greater advantages than other men, they might likewise have some peculiar temptations.—When *religious* disputes arise, they will naturally be managed with greater warmth, than questions on other subjects, by reason of their superior importance, and the conviction of each party that their sentiments alone are agreeable to the will of God. But this warmth will not be pe-

* 1 Tim. vi. 3, 4.

culiar to the clergy; the people will engage in the dispute with equal acrimony. If there be instances in which the clergy have inflamed the people, it is certain too, that, in some instances, the clergy have been urged to fiery zeal by the art of designing laymen; and that, in some instances, they have laboured to curb the fury, and to cure the bigotry of the people, by illustrating and enforcing the principles of toleration and free enquiry. Nay, uncommon ardor seizes not the friends of religion alone, in questions where it is concerned, but the opposers of religion likewise. Warmed with the moment of the subject, they too urge their arguments without a strict regard to the rules of moderation. Is not the Author, to whom we have so often referred, an example of it? Would he have reasoned on any other subject, in the manner in which he has reasoned concerning the character of the ministers of religion? Had he been perfectly free from that zeal which he imputes to us, and from the prejudice which it occasions, I am persuaded, that his benevolence of heart would have rejected with indignation the general reflexions which he has thrown out against the clergy, and that his strength of understanding would have enabled him to perceive, that they prove nothing to the disadvantage of the pastoral office, or of the

Christian religion. Wrong-turned zeal has sometimes excited the clergy to call in the assistance of the secular arm for the suppression of their antagonists; is not this Author, do you think, under the influence of some degree of the same spirit, when, in imitation of their conduct, he endeavours to alarm society against the attempts of the body of the clergy, as necessarily factious, ambitious, and persecuting? — Thus the *odium theologicum* is not peculiar to priests, it arises not from the particular genius of their calling, the corrupt passions of all men often take occasion, from the importance of religion, to inflame it in questions where religion is anywise concerned. Fully convinced of the truth of their own opinions, they are too apt to indulge intemperate zeal, under the appearance of the love of truth. — But have clergymen no temptations to this vice from which other men are free? Perhaps they have. If religion be already perverted, if the credit of peculiar tenets be substituted in the place of the interests of religion, which always coincide with the interests of virtue; they will, in that situation, but only in that, have a temptation to support their peculiar tenets with intemperate zeal, because their own credit and their livelihood will depend upon the belief which their opinions meet with. But could either depend so much on this, if the people

were

were not fired with a bigoted attachment to certain peculiar tenets, and disposed to desert or persecute their teachers, when they differ from them? Into the corruption of the people, therefore, that temptation must, in some measure, be ultimately resolved, which, on a superficial view, seems to arise from the pastoral office. In truth, religion is first corrupted through the weakness or wickedness of men; this corruption enters into the characters of all who profess it; both together pervert the pastoral office from its genuine spirit; and the perversion of it increases that corruption from which it sprung.—If a man enter into the pastoral office fired with a spirit of disputation or wrong turned zeal, the fault is chargeable only on his natural temper or his education. But if he enter into it without this spirit, the office will give him some advantages for avoiding it. It is acknowledged that, in other subjects, an acquaintance with the various opinions of learned men, and with the arguments by which each supports his own, tends to secure a man from unreasonable dogmatism. If it has the same tendency in religion, a clergyman must have an inducement to moderation, from his office. His office leads him also to study the Scriptures, in which meekness and all the kindred virtues are enforced by every method, by examples, by precepts, by promises,

mises, and their opposite vices are exposed, prohibited, and severely threatened: and this surely has some tendency to sweeten the temper and humanize the heart.—In a word, my brethren, a spirit of bitter zeal springs not from religion, nor from the office of the teachers of religion, but from a corruption of both; from a corruption, however, to which human nature is so prone, that it will require the greatest vigilance, both of ministers and of the people, to preserve themselves from its infection *.

I HOPE

* Mr. HUME, far from discovering the fallacies of that reasoning which induced him to draw so disagreeable a character of the clergy, or from softening that character on mature reflexion, which it had not been unreasonable to expect from his judgment and candour, has thought proper, in the last edition of his *Essays*, to add *revenge* to the catalogue of vices with which he charges them. “Revenge, says he, is a very natural passion to mankind; but seems to reign with the greatest force in priests and women: because being deprived of the immediate exertion of anger, in violence and combat, they are apt to fancy themselves despised on that account; and their pride supports their vindictive disposition.” I do not imagine that the Author intends to throw any reflection on women, by joining them with priests in this character; he rather intends to bestow plausibility on his charge against the clergy, by bringing that charge, at the same time, against women. *A woman’s revenge* has become a proverb among those, who are desirous to propagate a disadvantageous character of that sex. An unwary reader, finding priests classed with women, may take it for granted that a vindictive temper is ascribed likewise to priests, by some trite maxim; and the supposed authority of that maxim will

I HOPE it is by this time evident, that this Author has hastily thrown off a portrait for

will render him less ready to enquire, whether it be justly ascribed to them. But the assertion, that revenge reigns with peculiar force in priests, is by no means evidently true. It has never, so far as I know, passed into a common saying; it is not here supported by any comparison of their conduct with that of others, in particular instances; and it would be very easy to shew that revenge has been as frequent, and as implacable in men of other professions as in clergymen.—But as this Author only infers the matter of fact, by reasoning from a circumstance in the situation of the clergy, his charge can claim no degree of probability, except what it derives from the force of that reasoning. He lays the charge, it must be owned, with an uncommon diffidence; he had asserted boldly that the other vices *are* characteristic of the clergy; but he only says that this *seems* to belong to them. Yet his reasoning has not strength enough to bestow even the *appearance* of truth on his assertion. It will be found, on the most superficial examination, to be as weak as any argument which ever dropt from so able a philosopher. What is the reason, why revenge is strongest in priests and women? It is “because they are deprived of the immediate exertion of anger in violence and combat.” It has hitherto been the unanimous opinion of philosophers, and the experience of all ages has seemed to confirm it, that the indulgence and *exertion* of any passion tends to strengthen it, and to render it habitual; and that *abstinence* from the exertion of it tends to weaken it, and can even wear out, by degrees, the most rooted habit of any vicious passion. In consequence of these acknowledged principles, all men would be apt to conclude, that priests and women *being deprived of the exertion of anger in violence and combat*, this passion, in all its forms, must be weakened in them more than in others. But this author has discovered, it seems, that all this is perfectly the reverse of truth. If to be restrained from the exertion of anger has really, as he affirms it has, a tendency to cherish a temper of revenge; it will necessarily follow, that the only proper method of weakening any passion is to

for the ministers of religion, which does by no means express their genuine features; and that

exert it upon all occasions, and to satiate it with indulgence, and that abstinence from such exertion will infallibly strengthen it. Thus all the received maxims and rules of conduct will be perfectly inverted. Repeated acts must *weaken* every habit. A modest woman must acquire very strong sensual passions, for she is *deprived of the exertion of them*; and a common prostitute must have extremely weak desires. A temperate man must have a violent and constant craving for liquor, while the greatest drunkards have the least appetite for it. Such are the necessary consequences of this author's reasoning—But what is that particular exertion of anger, of which priests and women are deprived? The author seems to mean that they are excluded from the privilege of *duelling*. Truly priests have not been always excluded from it. When duels were first introduced by the *Goths* and *Vandals*, churchmen were admitted to them; and many instances of priests engaged in single combat are recorded in history. Duelling has been generally condemned by considerate persons; it has been supported by corrupt *fashion* in opposition to *reason*; attempts have been sometimes made to palliate or extenuate its folly and its guilt; but few have gone so far as to endeavour to prove that it is altogether innocent. This author's reasoning however, if it were just, would prove it to be not only *innocent*, but likewise highly *useful*. On his principles, it must be a powerful and absolutely necessary means of moral culture; it alone can prevent a vindictive temper; all who are excluded from it, must become a prey to inveterate revenge. Strange that they alone should be deemed placable and forgiving, who scruple not to avenge the smallest appearance of offence, with the death of the offender! that a savage custom, unknown to the politest nations of antiquity, decried by all wise men, introduced in the most barbarous times, on purpose to *execute* and *satisfy* revenge, should, notwithstanding, be the only effectual instrument of *extinguishing* revenge! If we will not avow these consequences, we must admit that this author's reasoning is fallacious, and that his conclusion ought to have been the opposite of what it is: but these consequences who will

that the charge which he brings against the spirit of our office, has been rendered in any degree

will avow? But it is not only by preventing the exertion of anger, that their being excluded from violence and combat makes revenge to reign with greatest force in priests and women. The Author adds, "They are apt to fancy themselves despised on that account, and their pride supports their vindictive disposition." We readily acknowledge that pride supports any passion, with which it happens to coincide. But though we should allow that pride will be excited in this case, yet it has an opposite force to combat. We must be of opinion, notwithstanding Mr. Hume's authority, that abstinence from the exertion of anger has really a tendency to weaken anger. Pride must, therefore, have, not *some* tendency only to support and strengthen anger, but a *greater* tendency to strengthen it, than abstinence has to weaken it, before it can produce the effect which is here ascribed to it. There will, however, be no occasion to balance nicely these contrary forces against each other; for pride can scarce have any concern in the matter. Before pride can be engaged, persons must really fancy that they are despised on account of their being excluded from the privilege of combat. But combat must be very universal, before any person can apprehend contempt on this account: it can happen only, when all except priests and women are forward to insult and challenge; and when all are, moreover, either brutes or cowards, for such only will attack those, who are known to be unarmed and defenceless. In truth, however, a very small proportion of mankind ever think of exerting their anger in single combat. The far greatest part, therefore, can have no propensity to despise those, who are excluded from it; but all, who from any motives abstain from combat, must be as apt as priests and women to fancy themselves despised, to find their pride alarmed, and, by consequence, must be as much subject to a vindictive temper. In a word, priests and women run no peculiar risk of the contempt to which this author pronounces them exposed; their pride, therefore, cannot be naturally roused by their situation, in order to support revenge; without its being roused, their being deprived, in the words of the *Essay*, of the immediate exertion of anger will rather obstruct, than

degree plausible, only by fixing on some separate circumstances of our profession, by omitting some of their most natural effects upon the character, and by exaggerating the rest; nay by ascribing circumstances to our office, which are not only foreign, but even repugnant to it; by confounding the temptations, which may arise from the corruptions of it or of the gospel, with the direct and essential tendency of both; and by comparing the highest degree of the vices to which these temptations may solicit us, with the lowest degree of the vices into which other men may be led by their particular situation. If the vices to which clergymen are most exposed, be compared with the same degree of the vices to which men of other professions are liable, the former will not appear to be more odious than the latter. It cannot be pretended that the peculiar temptations of the pastoral office are more generally complied with, than the common temptations of our earthly state, or the peculiar temptations of other professions. There is, therefore, no reason for representing the character of the clergy as peculiarly disagreeable in comparison with other characters. There is still less reason

promote a vindictive disposition; they will escape this disposition, except more powerful causes, than those which are here assigned, contribute to produce it; and till much stronger evidence of the charge be produced, than any which arises from this Author's reasoning, the voice of mankind will acquit them from any peculiar degree of a revengeful temper.

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for censuring the spirit of our office, or the gospel by which it is instituted. In the preceding enquiry, we have not dissembled any real temptation to the vices charged upon us, which can arise from our profession. But it has appeared that, whatever these temptations be, they arise from it only *secondarily* and *indirectly*; from the corruptions of our office, not from the office itself, whose *primary* and *prevailing* tendency is only to virtue. It has appeared, that, if our functions be performed aright, they will naturally and strongly promote sincere and manly piety, completed by universal virtue; and will lead to warm and diffusive benevolence, fit not only to check all angry passions, and all designs hurtful to mankind, but to prompt us likewise to uninterrupted assiduity in producing the happiness of others, by instilling the most important knowledge, and recommending the purest virtue.

IF this be the character, which the ministerial office tends to form in the several individuals of our society, it will be unnecessary to prove by any additional arguments, that no government can have reason to dread the attempts of the society itself, while its members retain the true spirit of their profession. As long as they are actuated by it, they must agree in considering all mankind as united into one
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great society, under the supreme government of God, and in regarding themselves as members of this system, connected with all the parts of it, employed to promote the order, and enforce the laws of this most antient and universal polity, by doing their utmost to render all to whom their influence can reach, wise and virtuous and happy. They must totally apostatize from this spirit, before they can form themselves into a *faction*, eager to establish any separate interest, any interest distinct from that of truth, goodness, and mankind. They must contract a spirit *opposite* to that which results from the *true* genius of their calling, before they can concur in giving scope to *ambition*, *pride*, or a *persecuting spirit*. Society can have no reason to be more jealous of their attempts, than of the attempts of any other class of men; for they are not more apt to degenerate from the virtuous spirit of their profession, and to promote faction or persecution, than other men are to become vicious; and to form designs, and to pursue measures, equally destructive of the peace and order of civil government. A peculiar jealousy of the clergy, and a desire to depress them, will always indicate a prevailing corruption of manners, a disaffection to religion, an indifference about the practice of real virtue, and about the eternal happiness of mankind,

mankind, in the societies or individuals who entertain that jealousy.

It was remarked, in the beginning of this discourse, that the enquiry which we proposed for the subject of it, is of a very practical nature. It suggests important instructions, both to *ministers* and to the *people*.

1. EVERY part of the investigation now attempted, forces reflections into our view, which merit the attention of all the ministers of the gospel. It shows us, my reverend fathers and brethren, both the *advantages* and the *difficulties* of our situation; both the strong *obligations* to virtue which we lie under, and the dangerous *temptations* to vice to which we are exposed. By exhibiting the former it urges us, *seeing we have this ministry, not to faint* *, till we have attained that blameless holiness which is so strictly incumbent on us. By discovering the latter, it warns us to *take heed to ourselves* † with the most constant vigilance, lest we be seduced by them.

THE *office of a Bishop* is, indeed, *a good*, a worthy *work* ‡. It has the strongest tendency to adorn the characters of those who exercise it, with

* 2 Cor. iv. 1.

† 1 Tim. iv. 16.

‡ Chap. iii. 1.

universal holiness, the true beauty, the only excellence of the human soul. It gives us the noblest opportunities of saving ourselves, by doing all that we can to promote the salvation of others. The advantages which we enjoy, demand from us the purest and the sublimest virtue. The voice of mankind, the nature of our office, the credit of our religion, call upon us to guard carefully against every sin, and to study to excell others in every amiable quality. In gratitude, in duty, in interest, in honour, by every possible tie, we are indispenfibly obliged to be *blameless*, to have our souls deeply tinctured with all real goodness, and to render our whole lives an uninterrupted series of conspicuous holiness. Every degree of vice in us is singularly atrocious, not only in the opinion of the world, but in the eye of unbiaffed reason, and in the unerring judgment of God; and will be punished with the greatest severity: and what would be esteemed only a defect of virtue in others, will ever be accounted a positive and heinous vice in us. In vain shall any minister of the gospel expect to derive esteem from the dignity of his calling, if he do not walk worthy of it. Its dignity arises from its holiness. A vicious minister will debase it more, in the opinion of the world, than all the groundless censures of its enemies. Nay, brethren, to our vices their reflections may justly be imputed;

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for our vices alone put it in their power to censure the genius of our profession, to revile our order, or to blaspheme the gospel for our sakes ; our vices alone dispose mankind to listen, in any degree, to their aspersions, or hinder them from rejecting them with indignation.

By improving the advantages which our occupation gives us, we may, with the assistance of God, which will never be wanting to us but through our own fault, attain the highest degree of virtue : but by misimproving them, we shall sink into the lowest degeneracy. As meat which is extremely nourishing to the healthful, may inflame dangerous distempers in the weak, so advantages for cultivating virtue, which have the most powerful influence on the well-disposed, will contribute to harden the wicked in their vices. The danger of our falling short of that exalted virtue which our advantages render indispensable, and the danger of our perishing for ever, which will necessarily spring from our falling short of it, have appeared so great to many pious persons of our profession, that they have not scrupled to express their fears, that a smaller proportion of our order, than of other ranks of men, shall obtain salvation. Certainly, we cannot be too careful to impress upon ourselves the deepest sense of both these dangers, which the strict-

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ness of our obligations and our signal advantages render very great. It is infinitely hazardous for a vicious man to enter into the pastoral office; it is infinitely hazardous for us to neglect the immediate application of its advantages to the improvement of our own hearts; for if the peculiar means of holiness which it affords, do not very quickly excite the ministers of the gospel to virtue, there is scarce a chance for their reformation. Where can they find means of reformation, more efficacious than those with which they have already refused to comply? It is of great importance, that every person, who aspires to this sacred office, should devote himself early to piety and virtue, that he may be qualified to improve its opportunities, and to avoid its dangers. It is of everlasting importance to his own soul. Every man who finds himself destitute of the seeds of exalted and uniform goodness, ought to relinquish all thoughts of engaging in a profession, to which his vices, of whatever kind they are, will be a reproach and ignominy. Whoever has entered into the pastoral office ought to give up himself to the practice of its duties, and, as much as possible, to confine himself to them, that he may not lose the advantages for cultivating virtue, which this office puts in his power. He ought to be extremely attentive to the manner in which he exercises

exercises his sacred functions, that he may avoid the heinous vice which will infallibly arise from the negligent or the improper exercise of them, and attain that improvement of heart, which will be promoted by the diligent and right performance of the duties of his holy calling.

SOME vices, as intemperance, impiety, excessive dissipation, are so unsuitable to our profession, that they will be indulged only by the abandoned; they demonstrate a total depravation of heart, a mind lost to all the principles of goodness. In the most degenerate state of things, these vices will not be very frequent in our society; the least approach to them is universally reckoned scandalous. We should guard against these, because they will infallibly render our characters odious, and all our labours useless. However slightly they may be disapproved in others, let us remember, not only that they are highly blameable in their own nature, but also that the world will ever regard them with indignation in a clergyman, that even the perverted judgement of those who practise them, will pronounce them detestable in him, that even they who solicit him to commit them, and seem to like his gaiety, will despise him in their hearts. Let not the example or corrupted sentiments of the world, let
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not an affectation of spirit and freedom, let not the fear of being reckoned austere, morose, or stubborn, let not any inducement, prevail with us to admit the lowest degree of these vices into our character or practice. The virtues opposite to these are absolutely necessary to preserve us from universal infamy; let us take care that we have not the appearance of them only, but that we really possess the virtues themselves, and excell in them. They are enforced upon us by the spirit of our profession in its full strength; they are inculcated by *all* the moral principles, by which our employment operates on the temper.

THERE are some other vices, which have not so *manifest* a repugnance to our profession, or which may even appear to spring from a common and probable abuse of it. But for that very reason, we have greater need to be upon our guard against them. Intemperate zeal and its kindred vices will insinuate themselves more imperceptibly than those which were mentioned before, will disguise themselves more artfully, will more easily elude the observation of the ignorant, or, perhaps, will be even consecrated by them. In general, the vices which we are in greatest danger of indulging, are those which admit of the fairest pretexts, and which are most apt to be confounded with
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some virtuous principle; our profession does not afford all the motives to abstinence from these, which it affords to abstinence from other vices, though it affords all that their nature will allow. If we attend to the exhortations which the inspired writers address to ministers of the gospel, we shall find that they much oftener give us warning against the vices of this class, than against others; thus plainly intimating that we are obnoxious chiefly to these. To avoid every degree of these will require the greatest circumspection. These will be more frequent in our society than other vices. These alone can, with any *plausibility*, be charged on the spirit of our office. If we indulge ourselves in these, their prevalence will furnish our more discerning enemies with the most specious arguments against us. Instead of entertaining resentment against them, let us turn their censures to our own advantage. The ministerial office has not such a tendency to any vice, as can justly expose its spirit to reproach; but the vices which are imputed to it, may notwithstanding be those which a wicked or a careless minister will most probably indulge. Let us not be satisfied with a conviction, that our office does not deserve censure; but let every individual take care, that he may not desert it. Adversaries of penetration will be sure to attack us on the side where we are

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weakest. Let us take warning; let us employ particular attention there; let us beware of every thing that can lead us into the vices which they impute to us. Our office has its peculiar temptations; let us not disguise them from ourselves; let us rather be solicitous to discover them: they cannot reflect dishonour on that office, or on religion; yet they may sometimes put our virtue to a very difficult and hazardous trial; they will overcome us and seduce us into vice, if we be not vigilant and circumspect. But if, through the grace of God, whom we serve in the gospel, we strenuously resist them, we shall acquire strong habits of sincere piety, unfeigned humility, diffusive benevolence, meekness, gentleness, charity, and every amiable virtue which can adorn our station or our religion.

2. THE enquiry in which we have been engaged, likewise suggests useful instructions to the laity.

In the present age, and in this nation, infidelity has erected its standard, and many have enlisted in its service. If there be any among these, who think that they have rejected the gospel after a fair examination of its evidences, we will pray fervently to God, that he may have mercy upon them, and bring them to the

knowledge of the truth *. We will beseech them, for their own sakes, to take care that they have been really *unprejudiced* in their enquiries. Prejudices *against* religion may insinuate themselves as imperceptibly as prejudices *for* it; and they are, at least, as highly blameable. If God has really given a revelation of his will to mankind, every degree of unfairness in examining its evidence, will be highly vicious in the judgment of reason and natural conscience, and will evidently deserve the severest punishment. But, without pretending to judge of men's secret intentions, we may surely say, that when men attack religion, either in public or private, either in conversation or from the press, by throwing out undistinguished reflexions against the clergy; when they exaggerate the failings of individual clergymen, and charge them on the whole body; when they attempt to reproach the spirit of the ministerial office, by partial or wrong representations of its nature; when they labour to overturn religion, by raising a groundless prejudice against the teachers of it; this affords a presumption of prejudice, though perhaps unsuspected by themselves; which, when it is pointed out to them, may justly excite them to review the temper and care with which they have en-

* 1 Tim. ii. 4.

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quired into religion. If an infidel be not possessed with blameable prejudice, he will certainly confine himself, in his attacks against religion, to direct arguments, carefully avoiding every topic which may weaken its *influence*, without deciding concerning its *truth*. Let illiberal reflexions against the clergy be left to the tribe of *vulgar* infidels, who have not perhaps penetration enough to discover, that they do not amount to a full confutation of christianity. Let those abstain from them, who are capable of perceiving, that many ministers may be extremely vicious, and yet the office which they hold may have a virtuous tendency, and the gospel may be true.

My subject leads me also to address the *christian* people. It leads me to warn you, my friends, not to allow any man to *beguile* you with enticing words, by *slight and cunning craftiness*, whereby many lie in wait to deceive *. It leads me to exhort you, that ye should earnestly contend for the faith, which was once delivered unto the saints; for there are many crept into christian countries, who deny the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ †. Let not example, let not inconclusive cavils, let not unsubstantial turns of wit, prevail with you to deny the

* Col. ii. 4. Eph. iv. 14. † Jude iii. 4.

Lord that bought you †, in opposition to your rational conviction. You may adopt some of the maxims of infidels, without perceiving their consequences; you may be infected with their spirit, while you reject their principles. This is shameful inconsistency; but every day's experience evinces that men may fall into it. Infidels have no prejudice against ministers of the gospel, except on account of their being the teachers of christianity; they reproach them only, that they may wound religion. But do not some of you join in despising, ridiculing, or reproaching the christian ministry, though you acknowledge the truth of the christian religion? The conduct of infidels is extremely foolish, because their reasoning is evidently fallacious. But your conduct is infinitely more absurd; you promote the designs of unbelievers against yourselves; you inconsiderately contribute to the success of a cause which you abhor. It has been often observed, that modern deists have derived, from those very scriptures which they reject, juster opinions in natural religion, than the wisest heathens were able to form by unassisted reason; and that the gospel has thus insensibly refined the principles even of its enemies. But it may be observed with equal truth, that the prevalence of infidelity has

† 2 Pet. ii. 1.

greatly

greatly corrupted the *sentiments* and *practice* even of those whose *faith* it could not directly subvert. Be on your guard, therefore, against the contagion of its spirit.—Indeed, you have a right to expect exemplary holiness from your ministers; vice in them may justly excite your indignation; and your expressing your disapprobation of it, in every proper manner, may prevent it from becoming frequent. Be sure, however, to find fault only with real vices. Confine your censures to the individuals who are guilty. In your censures even of them, remember still, that they are weak and fallible creatures like yourselves, exposed to all the temptations of this state of trial. But let not the faults of a few be imputed to all. Do not, on account of them, despise or reproach the office. Blame vicious ministers for behaving *unsuitably* to their profession; but remember, that this very judgment implies the *excellence* of that profession. While you believe the gospel, you ought to preserve a high regard for the office of teaching it; you ought to *esteem* those, who are employed in it, *very highly in love for their work's sake* *. If you despise the order in general, you despise their *work*, you despise the *gospel*; for the gospel is both the source and the subject of their employment. Is this consistent with your being christians?

* 1 Thess. v. 13.

You,

You, brethren, as well as ministers, enjoy great advantages for the practice of holiness, by the gospel. Your obligations and your dangers are very similar to ours. It is your business to study and to practise that religion, which it is our business to teach and inculcate on you. Let your sense of the advantages which it affords, animate you to blameless holiness. Let your sense of the danger of your misimproving these advantages, excite your vigilance and caution. In opposition to all temptations, *walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called**; *walk worthy of the Lord unto all well-pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God*†; *let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ*‡, which you have learned, which we have taught, and by which both you and we must be judged at last.

MAY God fill the hearts both of ministers, and of the people, with the true spirit of the gospel of JESUS! *Amen.*

• Eph. iv. 1.

† Col. i. 10.

‡ Philip. i. 27.

THE END.

You, brethren, as well as ministers, enjoy great advantages for the practice of holiness, by the Gospel. Your obligations and your dangers are very similar to ours. It is your business to study and to practise that religion which is our business to teach and inculcate on you. Let your sense of the advantages which it affords, animate you to diligence and holiness. Let your sense of the danger of your neglecting these advantages, excite your vigilance and caution. In opposition to all temptations, walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called; walk worthy of the Lord, unto all well-pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; let your conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ; which you have learned, which we have taught, and by which both you and we must be judged at last.

MAY God fill the hearts both of ministers and of the people, with the true spirit of the Gospel of Jesus! Amen.

• Eph. iv. 1. † Col. i. 10. ‡ Philip. i. 12.

THE END.

